

MOHAMED FEKINI AND THE FIGHT TO FREE LIBYA

Angelo Del Boca

Translated by Antony Shugaar

ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES





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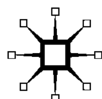
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Odyssey of the Fekini Family from 1926 to 1932

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Illustrations

Abbreviations

AAF	Archivio Anwar Fekini
ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
ASMAE	Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri
ASMAI	Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana
AUSSME	Archivio Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito
BMA	British Military Administration
CMPA	Carte Miani presso l'Autore
DDI	Documenti Diplomatici Italiani
DLPA	Documenti sulla Libya presso l'Autore
ISIAO	Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente
RCTC	Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali
RD	Regio Decreto
b.	box
env.	envelope
f. file	ff. files
ph. sect.	photographic section
pos.	position
tel.	telegram
telespr.	telespresso (literally, "telexpress")

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Foreword

This book would never have been written had it not been for the determination and persistence of Anwar Fekini, Esq., a Libyan citizen with a degree from the Sorbonne and law offices in London, Paris, and Tripoli. Through Philippe Preti, Esq., of Geneva, Anwar Fekini contacted me to learn if I would be willing to "*rédiger une étude historique retraçant la vie et le combat*" ("write a historical study of the life and battles") of his grandfather. Subsequently, when we met in Turin, Anwar Fekini informed me that, in order to facilitate my research, he was willing to give me access to his grandfather's memoirs,[1] as well as to a series of 335 documents consisting of letters that his grandfather wrote and sent to Turkish and Italian authorities (quite a few, in particular, to the Italian general Rodolfo Graziani) and to a number of Libyan chieftains. Last of all, he presented me with a substantial collection of photographs of the Fekini family and of places where his grandfather had lived and worked.

As a historian of Italian colonialism, I was familiar with the life and deeds of Hajj Mohamed Khalifa Fekini. I had written extensively about him in both volumes of my book *Gli italiani in Libia,*[2] and I knew that he had been one of the most stubborn opponents of the Italian occupation of Libya. He was the *mutasarrif* of the Rojeban tribe during Ottoman rule in Tripolitania; the *kaymakam* of Fassatu during the early years of the Italian occupation; and the *mutasarrif* of Fezzan during the brief existence of the *Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya* (or Tripolitanian Republic). Mohamed Fekini[3] soon entered into a head-on collision course with the Italian government. In September 1916, the Italian governor Giovanni Ameglio issued a reward of 10,000 francs for his capture.[4] It was, however, particularly in the period beginning in 1920, after the Italians broke their promises and abolished the Statute that had been conceded to the Libyans, that Mohamed Fekini, indifferent to the repeated calls for his surrender,

took up arms with the 2,500 men of his *mehallas* to block the Italian attempts to penetrate into the mountainous region of the Jebel.

On September 13, 1920, in one of the numerous battles against the Berbers fighting under Khalifa ben Askar, who were frequently Italian allies, Mohamed Fekini lost his eldest son, Hassan, who had completed high school in Damascus and had gone on to study law at the University of Turin. Two years later, in an effort to fight back against Graziani's Gruppo Mobile—or mobile group—which was attempting to reoccupy the Jebel and resettle it with Berber tribes, Mohamed Fekini won a clear victory at the wells of el-Uchim, only to be harshly defeated in the days that followed on the outskirts of the oasis of el-Josh and at the Gorge of As Salamat. During this fighting, he lost a second son, Hussein, who had just turned 20.

Driven out of the Jebel, Mohamed Fekini made a fighting withdrawal into the Ghibla, and from there into the Hamada al Hamra, and from there into Fezzan. In 1930, he was finally driven over the border into Algeria, under a hail of bombs, at the end of a conclusive offensive unleashed by General Graziani. By now 72 years old and verging on blindness, Mohamed Fekini was forced to abandon his country after ten years of being relentlessly hunted through one of the most inhospitable regions on earth, as well as being reduced to hunger by a merciless embargo of all provisions. He and his *mujahideen* had fought for ten years against a powerful enemy, occasionally managing to strike lucky blows at their foe but more frequently themselves receiving tremendous blows. They left shreds of their flesh everywhere they passed, from the Mediterranean coast to the southernmost borders of Libya, along 1,500 kilometers (a thousand miles) of dunes, serir, and lunar mountains. They only left their country when they felt the hot breath of their adversaries on the back of their necks. Then, and only then, with tears in their eyes and fury in their hearts, did they reluctantly cross the invisible desert frontier.

After surrendering to the French garrison of Fort Tarat, Mohamed Fekini, with his wife Aicha Nouir, his four surviving children, and all that remained of one of the most daring and agressive *mehallas* of all Libya (now disarmed), undertook a journey that would last for two long years. An authentic biblical exodus through desert regions such as the plateau of Tinrhert and the Great Eastern Erg. On a line with the city of Nefta, Fekini entered Tunisia and, after spending time in Tozeur, Al Hamma, Metlaoui, Degache, and Es Segui, he stopped at Gabes, where he spent the rest of his life, dying on March 28, 1950. He had once been the wealthy owner of houses, olive groves, orange

groves, and vast herds of livestock; his total assets, when he left Libya, consisted of 16 camels and the gold jewelry his wife Aicha wore. Just enough to stave off starvation. And yet, one of his sons, Mohieddine, graduated from the Sorbonne and later became prime minister of Libya under King Idris al-Senussi. Another son, Ali Nouredine, went into the field of diplomacy and served as Libya's ambassador to Tunisia.

I was quite familiar, then, through the documents in our archives, with the story of Mohamed Fekini and his family. It was also my opinion that the material I had already gathered was more than enough to assemble an exhaustive profile of this remarkable man: a warrior and a patriot. But what led me to accept so enthusiastically the offer made by the grandson of the irreducible freedom fighter was the opportunity to add to the already rich trove of Italian documentation a substantial quantity of Arabic documentation: documentation, moreover, that had been written or assembled by Mohamed Fekini himself. For the first time, an Italian historian would have an opportunity to study the thoughts, feelings, passions, and aspirations of the "others," and at the same time make a comparison of the two versions of events. Since this is a privilege that only a historian can fully value and appreciate, let me add only my heartfelt thanks to Anwar Fekini for the extraordinary opportunity that he has given me.

I am also grateful to Omar Saghi, who translated from Arabic into French Mohamed Fekini's *Memoirs*, and to Zahi Kaied, who translated out of Arabic the enclosures, providing us with a clear understanding of the texts. I would further like to express my gratitude to Jean-Pierre Milelli, who has already prepared a splendid French version of *One Step Away from the Gallows* (original Italian title: *A un passo dalla forca*; French title: *A un pas de la potence*). Let me also express my thanks for the invaluable information provided by Fadel and Mohamed Fekini, sons of Lamine Fekini; Embarka Nasr, wife of Lamine Fekini; Mariam Boubaker, daughter of Mohamed Fekini; and Manoubia Ben Hamida, second wife of Ali Nouredine Fekini. And finally, a heartfelt thanks goes to the historian Matteo Dominioni, who has carried out for me fruitful research in the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Rome.

Turin, December 2006

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Introduction

Ruth Ben-Ghiat

"I am neither a head of state nor the supreme leader of the Jebel. What I wish above all other things is to serve the interests of my homeland," wrote Mohamed Fekini to the Italian general Rodolfo Graziani in June 1922. "We desire peace. But I have absolutely no fear of your airplanes and I take full responsibility for my actions. None of us will live forever."[1] These statements by a leader of the resistance to Italian occupation in the region of Tripolitania to the head of Italian anti-rebel military operations introduce us to the world and spirit of Mohamed Fekini, and through him, to the hardships that marked the lives of Libyans who opposed Italian rule. Prefect of the Rojeban tribe during the Ottoman era, Mohamed Fekini was one of the very first to organize an armed resistance against the Italian invasion. After the Turks signed a peace treaty with the Italians, Mohamed Fekini served as governor of Fassatu and the western Jebel but took up arms again during the Arab insurrections of 1914–1915 and remained one of the Italians' most formidable opponents for the next 15 years. His letter to Graziani displays his commitment to defend his country, his courageous refusal to be intimidated by the Italians' superior technology, and a philosophical acceptance of the risks of death that come with the life of a warrior. The 1921 arrival of the brutal Graziani presaged the escalation of violence against the resistance in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica during the rule of the Italian Fascists (1922–1943). Mohamed Fekini continued to wage war against the Italians for eight more years after this letter. It was not until 1930, at age 75, that he went into exile—settling eventually in Tunisia—where he remained until his death in 1950.

The Fekini family has played an important role in colonial and post-colonial Libya. Mohamed Fekini served as prefect of Fezzan during

the formative experience of the Tripolitanian Republic (1918–1922), as well as being a key protagonist in the armed struggle against the Italians. His son Mohieddine Fekini became prime minister of Libya in 1963, at only 38 years old, after having served as ambassador to Egypt and to the United States, while another son, Ali Nourredine, became ambassador to Tunisia in 1959. As a scholar of Libyan origin, Ali Abdullatif Ahmida has written, "one could not write the history of Italy without studying its colonies, especially Libya. Similarly, one could not write the history of Libya without studying the history of Italy."[2] The history of Mohamed Fekini and his family, as narrated in this book by Angelo Del Boca, supports this view. *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya* is an account of some of the most dramatic and formative years of modern Libya, as seen through the lens of Fekini's activities in politics, in war, and as a patriarch—from Ottoman to Italian rule and through his children—to the years of Idris al-Sanussi's monarchy (1951–1969).

The mix of Italian and Libyan voices that marks the present book is fruit of a new period of scholarship on Italian colonial policies and on Libyan life under Italian occupation. Until the 1980s, neither topic received much attention from either Libyan or Italian scholars. On the Italian side, the absence of a process of decolonization and the lack of public debate about the moral and other legacies of colonialism, difficulties in gaining access to colonial archives, and the desire to maintain an image of their colonial rule as benevolent hampered the development of scholarship. Del Boca, along with Giorgio Rochat and Claudio Segrè, was a pioneer of this field of study, and his two-volume study of *Gli italiani in Libia* (*The Italians in Libya,* completed in 1986–1987) offered a masterful synthesis which was the fruit of his work in almost a dozen archives.[3] From this foundation has come work on colonial Libya by several generations of scholars, many of whom write in English and come from disciplines as disparate as history, political science, anthropology, and architectural history.[4]

Nor were conditions initially propitious for the writing of Libyan histories of the experience of Italian colonial rule. As Mia Fuller has observed, high illiteracy rates and the fact that the three regions that make up modern Libya (Tripolitania, the Fezzan, and Cyrenaica) were unified only during Fascist rule meant that the country came out of colonial rule without an established written historiography. Tellingly, during the monarchy, the most influential book on Libyan history, E.E. Evans Pritchard's *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949), was the work of an Englishman linked to the British military administration of

Libya (1943–1951).[5] Libyan research on the period of Fascist occupation received new impetus with the onset of the regime of Mu'ammar Qadhafi (1969–present), who presented himself as continuing a tradition of anticolonial uprising enshrined by Shaykh 'Umar al-Mukhtar, leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica. Yet it was only with the 1978 founding of the Libyan Studies Centre and its massive projects of oral history and research that a Libyan knowledge base has come into being about Italian colonialism and its postcolonial legacies.[6]

The new millennium has brought these two national historiographies about the Italian imperial engagement with Libya into dialogue. Agreements struck in the late 1990s by the Italian and Libyan governments, which recognized Italian efforts to acknowledge the consequences of 30 years of occupation and Libya's desire for international rehabilitation, opened the doors for exchanges between Libyan and Italian scholars. Joint conferences and publications and the opening of Italian document collections in Libya to Italian and other Western scholars have brought a renewed vitality to scholarship on colonial and postcolonial Libya.[7] The publication of the memoirs of prominent Libyan notables and politicians within and outside of Libya has also given a broader resonance to modern Libyan history, often providing an alternative to the antiroyalist narratives favored by the Qadhafi state.[8] The present book can also be said to be fruit of this general climate, in that it was made possible by the decision of Mohamed Fekini's grandson, Anwar Fekini, Esq., to make his grandfather's memoir and hundreds of letters available to an Italian scholar. Del Boca integrates these documents into a compelling reconstruction of colonial Libya that draws on a lifetime of research. The histories that Mohamed Fekini recounts therein confirm the more complex view of Libyan colonial society that has been emerging in recent years. They also raise a set of issues that still await further investigation, since they were not privileged by either the monarchy or the early Qadhafi state.

The first of these issues is the anticolonial resistance, which has been well studied as it unfolded in Cyrenaica in the late 1920s and early 1930s, because of the leadership of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, the prominence of the Sanusi order, and the infamous concentration camps there which imprisoned Bedouin foot soldiers of the resistance and their families.[9] Less known is the situation in Tripolitania, where Mohamed Fekini operated, and the long earlier period of resistance that preceded the advent of Fascism. Fekini's letters and memoir, as presented in Del Boca's book, convey the tenacity and intelligence of

that resistance and the serious difficulties it presented for the Italians, who were forced to fight a parallel war in the colonies while engaged in World War One. The strength of this resistance was in part behind the Italian concession of the Tripolitanian Republic, which was a crucial political experience for Mohamed Fekini and other leaders and a font of escalated hostility toward the Italian state when it was dissolved by the Fascists. Although it constituted “the first formal republican government in an Arab country” and had ideological echoes into the Qadhafi years, the Tripolitanian Republic is arguably less known in Western histories of imperialism than the Rif Republic (1921–1926) that resulted from revolts in Spanish Morocco.[10]

Mohamed Fekini’s writings, as presented by Del Boca, also make clear the corrosive effects of intertribal and regional factionalisms on Libyan resistance to Italian rule. A subtheme of the book is Mohamed Fekini’s relationship with his rival Sulayman al-Baruni, the controversial but influential Berber leader who was part of the Tripolitanian Republic directorate. It was during that republic, in fact, when the stakes for power were high, that Arab-Berber conflicts escalated into outright civil war, posing an obvious obstacle to the Libyan fight against the Italian occupier. Such strife, as well as Mohamed Fekini’s wariness of Sulayman al-Baruni’s ambiguous relationship with the Italian occupiers, was at the root of their continuing antagonism throughout the years. Both men ended up as exiles from their homelands, unable—even with their formidable stable of warriors and tested military strategies—to overcome the Fascist war machine.[11] The lessons of the strength of such regionalist and tribal feelings within Libyan identity and the experience of indigenous state formation, as embodied in the history of the Tripolitanian Republic, were not lost on Qadhafi.[12]

Mohamed Fekini’s experiences also remind us that the resistance raged on in Tripolitania after most of the region was supposedly “pacified” at the end of 1923. As of 1924, Mohamed Fekini continued his fight from his new base of operations in the Fezzan; the Italian governor of Tripolitania, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, referred to him the following year as “our unyielding enemy.”[13] Four more years of battle ensued, with the last face-off between Mohamed Fekini and the Italians occurring in 1929. By then, Mussolini had approved the largest military expenditure since the Libyan war to definitively rout the resistance in Tripolitania, leaving Mohamed Fekini, and other chieftains who did not want to collaborate, no choice but to go into exile. Del Boca’s quotations from the epistolary exchanges between

Mohamed Fekini and Rodolfo Graziani make this book unusually revealing of the tactics and mentalities that each side brought to the conflict. In letters delivered by airplane, Graziani used a blend of threats and flattery to urge his Libyan antagonist to cease his opposition to Italian dominion. As Del Boca relates, at one point in 1922, evidently frustrated by his adversary's intransigence, Graziani included a bomb with his missive, prompting Mohamed Fekini and other chieftains to reply that "corresponding by bombers [is] a provocation unworthy of a civilized state and an illustrious individual."[14]

The chronological arc of this book, which follows Mohamed Fekini and his family from the Ottoman to the postcolonial periods, allows for a valuable long view on Italian colonialism. It illuminates continuities between the liberal and Fascist era of colonialism. Racist ideologies, mass punishments (deportations, hangings, forced labor), and assertions of Italians' greater benevolence with respect to other European colonizers did not originate with Mussolini. Yet the book also sets off the specificity of a dictatorship whose officials scorned the "specious negotiations with rebels" that had led to the liberal-era Tripolitanian Republic and vowed to conquer all of Libya "at any and all costs."[15] This totalitarian attitude lay behind the Italian perpetration of mass crimes in Cyrenaica in the coming years, which resulted in between 40,000 and 70,000 deaths due to forced deportations, starvation and disease inside the concentration camps, and hangings and executions.[16] Far from hiding evidence of these camps, the Fascists made them public through newsreels and publications as evidence of their mastery of modern repressive technologies.[17] This take-no-prisoners attitude is evident in the response of the new governor of Libya, Italo Balbo, to Mohamed Fekini's repeated requests in the mid-1930s that his expropriated lands be restored to him so he could return home. "The old chief has preserved intact the mentality of 1919...when it was acceptable for native chieftains to negotiate with the government, and he believes that he can, in a decisive and authoritarian form, lodge demands that show nothing other than the extent of his effrontery."[18]

This multigenerational tale also offers a better sense of the variegated responses to and engagements with Italian colonialism than many conventional histories. At the core of the narrative is, of course, Mohamed Fekini, who initially served the Italian occupiers after their victory over the Ottomans but very soon became a protagonist of the armed resistance and wise counsel to other chieftains on military strategy. The all-too-brief life of his son Hassan Bey, who died

in battle in 1920, at only 25 years old, signals another trajectory. Hassan Bey formed part of a new Libyan elite: he studied in Tripoli, Cairo, and Damascus but also in Turin. He forged close ties with many prominent Italians before he returned to Libya to take part in the resistance and was eulogized on the floor of the Italian Senate by the Italian political theorist Gaetano Mosca after his death in battle at Berber hands.[19] Other children who were born later, such as Ali Nourredine, lived through the painful experience of exile with their father. Anna Baldinetti has recently argued for the formative nature of the years of exile in building Libyan nationalism and forging solidarities distinct from those of tribal or kinship networks. Mohamed Fekini (and later Ali Nourredine) was very active in the thousands-strong Tripolitanian community in Tunisia, and his extensive correspondence with politicians and other notables throughout the Maghreb consolidated relationships that would continue through the political and diplomatic careers of his sons.[20] In her study, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* Anna Baldinetti writes that "ambivalence was a feature of the relationship of most Muslim notables with the Italian colonial authorities," noting that many oscillated between collaboration and antagonism over the long span of Italian rule.[21] In the case of Mohamed Fekini, we have instead a refusal to accept that rule that did not waver for 35 years. His memoir is the fruit of his desire to bear witness to the *mujahideen* "who gave up their lives, their souls, and their money to fight in the name of God and to defend the honor of their fatherland."[22]

Del Boca has clearly taken his subject to heart, blending the objective voice of historical reconstruction with a passionate and partisan tone. *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya* is the work of a man who was himself a resistance fighter (Del Boca participated in the anti-Fascist armed struggle of 1943–1945) and author of a novel about those experiences.[23] That this is a personal as well as scholarly project for Del Boca is evident in the prose poem he wrote to conclude his book. This creative rendering of the main protagonists of Mohamed Fekini 's life—both his loved ones and his enemies—is Del Boca's homage to men and women whose "rights and history [were] unjustly crushed underfoot" and to a Libyan history he has engaged with for 30 years. It is, perhaps, also a homage to the importance of poetry as a form of testimony and a source for the recovery of Libyan colonial history, for Del Boca also includes several poems that Ali Nourredine wrote about the hardships and displacements that came with years of resistance and exile.[24]

"If you want to know me fully, you need only observe the way I live, my letters, my speeches, my past actions, which are all recorded in the archives of the *vilayet* (province)," Mohamed Fekini wrote in 1923 to Graziani.[25] We can thank Anwar Fekini for delivering into Angelo Del Boca's hands those letters and, above all, the testament of a life shaped by the struggle against Italian colonialism, first in Libya and then in exile. *Mohamed Fekini and the Fight to Free Libya* offers a portrait of a remarkable individual, as seen through his words and actions and through the dramatic histories of Italian occupation he lived and contested up to the final collapse of Fascist rule.

1

Tripolitania under Ottoman Rule

1. "A number of friends have asked me, more than once, to write an account of the years under Italian colonization. I decided to do that when I watched Italian colonialists destroy my country and its people. I trust that this account will help to shed light on the history of the Italian occupation of my country, and let Allah be witness to the sincerity and truthfulness of my words."[1]

With this solemn preface, the Arab chieftain Mohamed Fekini el Tarabulsi el Rogebani began his account of the Italian occupation of Libya, with a special focus on the events that occurred in Tripolitania between October 1911 (the date of the landing of the Italian expeditionary force in Tripoli) and February 1930, when the last surviving opponents of the Italian presence in Libya were forced to abandon the fight and flee the country into Algeria. Twenty years of warfare, then 20 years of attacks and retreats, with infrequent pauses in the fighting. Twenty years of grief and suffering for a people who sought, by any means possible, to safeguard their identity, culture, and religion from an increasingly despotic and devastating process of assimilation.

Mohamed Fekini began to write his account of the almost unbelievable role he played as a fierce opponent of Italian rule just a few months after he escaped by crossing the border into Algeria. During a lengthy stay in the *zawiya* of Sidi Moussa, in the desolate plateau of Tinrhert, he composed the first section of his autobiography, from the Italian landings on the Libyan coasts to the beginning of the Arab revolt in 1915. Fekini dictated the second section of his autobiography to his secretaries in Degache, in southern Tunisia, during the summer of 1931, at the end of his long march through the desert.

Fekini was extremely lucid, despite the fact that he was well over 70 years of age. He was capable of recalling in great detail any and

all events that he had experienced; he remembered names and dates with great precision. And his narrative provides us, for the first time, with an account of the Italian occupation of Tripolitania as seen from the Libyan side, from the viewpoint of the victims of that invasion. In our view, this is an extraordinary—indeed, unique—document, more significant and credible than the *Diario della guerra libica,*[2] a wartime diary that Enver Pasha wrote for a little longer than a year, when he was the commander-in-chief of the Turkish-Arab forces in Cyrenaica. This is not merely because Mohamed Fekini's account extends over a period of 20 years—the entire period of Arab resistance in Tripolitania—but also because it provides a careful and accurate depiction of a poor but fierce people, capable of great acts of heroism and noble aspirations, but also weakened by continuous squabbling and ancient resentments of ethnic origin.

Although Mohamed Fekini's mental faculties were exceedingly lucid while he wrote his memoirs and his warrior's passion remained intact, his vision was badly deteriorating. His left eye, as we can see from photographs taken before and during his exile in Tunisia, was completely blind, while his right eye was partly clouded by cataracts. Nonetheless, the aged Arab chieftain refused to be defeated by his almost total blindness. He fought to conquer the fog that oppressed him. The first part of his account is written in his own hand. This is evident from the handwriting, occasionally faltering but clearly the work of an educated man, with only occasional corrections. The second and more substantial section of the memoirs shows a less uniform script, the work of several scribes, with numerous erasures and crossouts. By now, Mohamed Fekini was almost entirely blind, and he was obliged to dictate his account to one of his four secretaries. In order to reconstruct the sequence of events, he relied upon the 335 letters that he wrote, over a 20-year period, to the Turkish and Italian authorities (many of these letters were addressed to General Graziani, his implacable adversary) as well as to the Arab chiefs of Tripolitania.

We see, in these memoirs, not only an understandable determination to set forth the role that the author played as a leader in the 20-year battle against the Italian invaders, but also—and primarily—an insistence that the revolt of the Libyans was fully and further justified by the violence and abuses of every sort practiced by the invaders, ranging from abuses of power, blatant theft, and confiscations to broken promises and open contempt for the country's customs and religion. It was a revolt that resulted in 100,000 deaths and the forced exodus of tens of thousands of other Libyans to Tunisia,

Egypt, Chad, Algeria, and Niger. A revolt that must not be forgotten because it marked and legitimized the birth of the Libyan nation.

2. A Turkish possession since 1551,[3] Tripolitania at the turn of the twentieth century was a very poor region, though it was nonetheless no less happy a place than any of the other more-plentifully endowed territories of the Maghreb. According to the Ottoman census of 1911, the total population of Tripolitania, excluding Fezzan, was 523,176, with 14,000 Jews and a few hundred Christians. The population was not homogeneous and was split up among sedentary tribes (330,000), seminomadic tribes (115,000), and nomadic tribes (80,000). The population was also composed of Arabs (the majority); Berbers (roughly a third of the population); and Cologhli, who were the descendants of intermarriages between Janissaries, originally sent here by the Ottoman government to man garrisons; and indigenous women, both Arabs and Berbers. Despite the varied complexities of the population, a general sense of tolerance among the diverse groups was rarely disturbed. And, in fact, the three thousand soldiers in the various Turkish garrisons, along with a few hundred Cologhli policemen, were sufficient to keep order in the *vilayet*.

In his memoirs, Mohamed Fekini devoted a number of pages to the history and geography of Tripolitania, displaying considerable cultural depth, despite the fact that he attended only Koranic schools—unlike his brother Ahmed Fadel, who had studied in Turkey and was, in 1911—at the time of the Italian invasion—a representative for the Jebel in the Parliament in Constantinople.[4] Good patriot that he was, Mohamed Fekini did his best to debunk the image of a poverty-stricken and barren Tripolitania, devoid of resources. He wrote: "Tripolitania is a region with mineral resources. There are deposits of sulfur, iron ore, and coal, as well as salt mines. The Ottoman authorities failed to exploit these mines, and indeed failed to show any interest in them at all; they handed over the rights to exploit them to private individuals." And he continued, "This region is a trading crossroads, exerting commercial power over its neighbors, especially Sudan. Most of the inhabitants of this region speak a mixture of Arabic and Berber, with the exception of the Nefusa tribe, which lives in the western mountains and in Zuara, and speaks only Berber and follows the Ibadite doctrine."[5]

Relations between the inhabitants of Tripolitania and the Turks who had occupied the country for several centuries were relatively untroubled, though they certainly could not be described as friendly.

One perceptive observer, Sheik Mohammed ben Othman al-Hachaichi, a curator in the library of the Grand Mosque of Tunis, wrote the following after a brief visit to Tripoli:

> All Turkish officers in Tripoli, from sergeant all the way up to general, enjoy considerable prosperity and leisure. Their salary is paid monthly, allowing them to reside in the finest quarters of town. Most of them are married. They dress with great elegance, and are constantly seeking pleasures and amusements. Their homes are furnished in the European style. From what I have been able to see, they have very little to do. As for the rank-and-file soldiers, they live in pitiable conditions: poorly dressed and undernourished, they receive their salaries only intermittently. As a result, they treat the natives with cruelty, especially the Arabs, whom they detest.[6]

This Tunisian sheik went on to state that "the country's revenue was insufficient to cover the expenses,"[7] which explained why, for centuries, the Sublime Porte had levied considerable taxes upon the inhabitants of Tripolitania (and Cyrenaica). Over the past few decades, however, this practice had shifted direction, at least as far as the provision of certain services and the application of some reforms were concerned. The Ottoman governors had, in fact, encouraged the settlement of the Bedouins, as well as the development of agriculture and trans-Saharan trade. They had equipped the cities with public buildings and, most importantly, they had encouraged "local education and the formation of an intelligentsia that modeled itself upon the models of political and cultural life in Istanbul."[8]

In 1878, the Ottoman government had passed a law providing mandatory schooling for all the inhabitants of the *vilayet*. As a result, between 1900 and 1910, 27 elementary schools were established in Tripoli, coexisting with the already-established Koranic schools (*kettab*). At a higher level were the *rushdiyya*, preparatory schools for those who wished to attend military high schools and technical institutes for the training of administrative officials.

The Turkish government, moreover, was willing to allow the establishment of foreign private schools. In 1909 Tripoli, there were 20 Jewish schools, 5 Italian elementary schools financed by the Italian government in Rome, an English school, and 2 French schools. In 1907, as Muhammad al-Tahir al-Jarari reports, "the first school for the handicapped was inaugurated in Tripoli, with funding from the French Franciscan mission, for the education of deaf mutes and the handicapped in general."[9] We should add that many young people

were able to complete their studies by attending Turkish universities, the famous al-Azhar University in Egypt, and the equally renowned al-Zaytuna University in Tunis. Given this panorama, which provides clear evidence of a full-fledged intellectual renaissance in Libya—brought about with the encouragement and assistance of the Ottoman government—the claims made by Italy under Giolitti that it was exporting civilization to Libya were clearly based on a combination of ignorance and duplicity.

3. In step with the development of education and culture, there was clear evidence of a burgeoning press sector, with newspapers and magazines published in various languages. In Tripoli alone, there were eight dailies and weeklies publishing in Arabic, Turkish, Italian, and Hebrew. Beginning in 1908, moreover, when the nationalist movement of the Young Turks forced Sultan Abdul Hamid II to restore the 1876 Constitution, which had been honored more in the breach than the observance, the inhabitants of the two Libyan *vilayets* enjoyed a number of fundamental rights. Aside from the freedoms of assembly and association, they were now authorized to send eight representatives to the parliament in Constantinople, while on March 20, 1909, the provincial council of the *vilayet* came into existence in Tripoli; it also represented the interior region of Fezzan.

The wave of new developments triggered by the revolutionary activity of the Young Turks and the increasingly evident interference of European nations in Libya stimulated, in Tripoli especially, the growth of a small class of urban businessmen, which—as Paolo Soave has pointed out—integrated itself into the "increasingly centralized Ottoman bureaucratic structure, at the same time in harmony with the frenetic capitalist atmosphere introduced by European profiteers."[10]

This, however, did not mean that the old class of notables had lost its power in what was still a fundamentally tribal society. In Tripoli, for instance, Pasha Hassuna Karamanli held sway; his family had governed Libya for the past 124 years on behalf of the Sublime Porte. In Misratah, the Muntasser family was in control, and they were among the first to collaborate with the Italians, although their services came with an exorbitant cost.[11] In Tarhuna, Ahmed el-Mraied's rule was uncontested, and he was destined to play a leading role in the anti-Italian resistance. The *kaymakam* of Fassatu was Mohamed Fekini, who had provided 30 years of honored service to the Ottoman administration and had been decorated by the governor of Tripolitania, Rajab Pasha, "for repelling the invasion of French troops and pushing

them back all the way to the Tunisian border."[12] The chief of the Orfella tribe was Abd en-Nebi Belcher, who would collaborate with the Italians in their conquest of Fezzan, only to betray them later by taking an active role in the great Arab Revolt of 1915.

No less authoritative were the Koobars, who had a presence in Tripoli and in the Jebel Garian; the Sef en-Nasser, masters of the oases of Al Jufrah, a caravan crossroads station of great importance, commanding access to Fezzan; and Ramadan al-Shitawi, who controlled a fiefdom in the Misratah area. The day of his tragic death would be described in the following words by Rodolfo Graziani himself: "So died the fiercest of all those who hated the name of Italy. And it was a lucky day for us, because he possessed to an excellent degree every quality of the barbarian chieftain, along with exceptional organizational and military skills, and a profound religious leadership."[13] Nor should we overlook the Berber notables, such as Yusuf Cherbisc; Khalifa ben Askar; Sultan ben Shaban; and first and foremost, Suleiman el-Baruni, who had completed his studies at the al-Zaytuna University and at the al-Azhar University in Cairo, and who had been elected representative for Jebel Nefusa in 1908.

None of these chieftains were lacking courage in combat, great cultural knowledge, or a profound patriotism. Unfortunately, however, they were not unified. Among the causes of division were religious and ethnic considerations and rivalry over control of territory. The Italians immediately exploited these divisions, attempting—and often succeeding in the effort—to pit each against the other, even though the result of these maneuvers was a senseless and implacable fratricidal war.

4. Among the European nations who were eyeing Libya with evident interest, Italy was in the front ranks. Ever since the 1881 Treaty of Bardo had allowed France to occupy Tunisia, where the Italian community greatly outnumbered the French community, the attention of Italian politicians and military men had shifted to the two *vilayets* of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, then to possessions of the Ottoman Empire.

For 30 years, they had done everything imaginable in order to carry out a successful Italian landing on what was commonly described as "the fourth shore" (from the Italian, "la quarta sponda"). Among the steps taken were military preparations for an invasion of the North African nation (1884), agreements with France (1902), and extensive

work to prepare Italian public opinion for a new colonial campaign while memories of Italy's defeat at Adwa (Ethiopia) were still painfully fresh. The effort to persuade the Italians that the conquest of Libya would require nothing more than a "military stroll in the park" and that Libya's fabulous wealth would easily repay all expense and risk was undertaken from 1910 onward by the Italian nationalists as well as by a substantial sector of the nation's newspapers and other news publications.

That press campaign, obsessive and feverish, lasted for over a year; we shall limit ourselves to quoting a contribution from Enrico Corradini (Italian novelist, essayist, journalist, and nationalist political figure—*translator's note*), who claimed that Libya, with its vast expanses of fertile farmland and abundant mineral wealth, could easily become both a colony for Italian settlement and exploitation. Moreover, he insisted that every sector of the Italian populace would benefit from the undertaking: the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, the government, and even the south, because "solving the southern question and occupying Tripolitania are not two *divergent actions*."[14] The occupation of Tripoli, furthermore, would have a major moral significance because it would mark the end of the unhappy time "known as the period of recovery," which had been marked by a "class struggle that had degenerated into class profiteering, that would constitute the first act of the Risorgimento, or rebirth, of the Italian nation."[15] There was yet another reason to go to Libya, Corradini stated, and it was the call of the past, the memory of imperial Rome, which had made Libya into one of its richest provinces: the breadbasket of the empire.[16]

Alongside its diplomatic preparations and its mobilization of public opinion, Italy was also carrying out secret activities in Libya. This array of operations was intended primarily to gather military information (specially trained officers were sent to Libya) but also to establish contact with Arab chieftains such as Hassuna Karamanli, who were not especially loyal to Turkey, and also to establish an effective influence in the country through a powerful and diffuse economic penetration. From 1907 on, the Banco di Roma was entrusted with responsibility for this "peaceful penetration." And in less than three years, the Banco di Roma had opened branch offices and commercial banking agencies in 17 cities, while undertaking a variety of industrial activities, such as shipping lines, agricultural oil mills, ice-making operations, quarries, farming operations, and printing plants.

The active and aggressive operations of the Banco di Roma, however, could hardly fail to prompt suspicions and mistrust among the Ottoman authorities. Enrico Insabato, a police official and confidante of Giolitti, was well aware of this. In a report dated August 12, 1911, that he sent to prime minister Giolitti, he wrote the following:

> According to Turks and many Arabs, the Banco di Roma is an organization created and funded by the Italian government to lay the groundwork for an occupation of Tripolitania, not merely to carry out banking business and extend Italian influence. The foremost evidence of this fact, the Turks are saying, is that the Italian consulates have been advocates on behalf of the Banco di Roma in opposition even to the interests of Italian citizens. The second piece of evidence is that the Banco di Roma attempts tirelessly to invade, seize control, and supplant all initiatives, all undertakings, all business. Its activity has been focused primarily upon absorbing and destroying small-scale trade and small businesses, whether they are Arab- or Italian-owned.[17]

Although Giolitti had ordered an intense effort to gather intelligence, even on the eve of the landing in Libya of Italy's expeditionary force, he possessed—in reality—only unreliable reports which were, in some cases, wrong and misleading. For instance, he believed, after reading the dispatches sent by Carlo Galli, head of the consulate general in Tripoli, that the Arabs nourished a profound hatred for the Turks, could not wait to be rid of them, and looked toward the Italians as their true liberators. On August 19, 1911, this is how Galli portrayed the situation in Tripoli:

> Once we have overwhelmed the resistance of the garrison in Tripoli, the small garrisons will fall, nor should we fear in any case that there will be a call for holy war. The coastal population in any case would not answer the call, because it is all too well aware of what a European government can do. And the tribes that might conceivably respond to such an appeal are poor, unarmed, or too distant to present any real threat.[18]

As late as September 9, less than a month before the invasion of Libya, Galli stated that he had "no evidence and no indications" of any cooperation between Turks and Arabs, and he begged the foreign minister, Antonino Paternò-Castello, Marchese di San Giuliano, "not to give any credence to other potentially alarming reports sent by

fanciful correspondents, or even reports invented out of whole cloth, to Rome."[19]

Actual events, as we now know, would evolve in quite a different direction. With the bitter surprise of Shara Shatt, which consecrated a perfect union of Arabs and Turks, Giovanni Giolitti finally understood that the invasion of Tripoli would not be a simple "military stroll in the park."[20]

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2

The Surprise of Shara Shatt

1. After the Sublime Porte rejected Giolitti's ultimatum,[1] at 3:30 p.m. on October 3, 1911, the Italian fleet[2] opened fire on the fortresses of Tripoli, which were armed only with outmoded cannons whose range was far inferior to that of the Italian artillery. In a few hours, beneath the hail of shells, the Sultaniya and Hamidie forts, and the batteries of the Lighthouse and the Quay were rendered helpless. While awaiting the main body of the expeditionary force (34,000 men and 72 cannons), which had not yet left Naples, the task of occupying Tripoli, completely abandoned by the Turks, fell to the 1,732 sailors under Commander Umberto Cagni.

The landing began at 3:00 in the afternoon on October 5 and ended, without incident, two hours later. The military commander of the *vilayet*, Colonel Neshat Bey, had in the meantime retreated with his troops to el-Azizia, 70 kilometers (45 miles) to the southeast of the capital, where he set up his headquarters. In Tripoli, on the other hand, Rear Admiral Raffaele Borea Ricci took the temporary title of governor general. On October 7, he issued a proclamation to the population at large, which stated, verbatim,

> We give you, dear inhabitants, our sacred word, as governor general, that we shall leave no means untested in our efforts to maintain the greatest respect and consideration toward the female sex; because if any reckless soul should venture to impugn your honor, rest assured that he will have, in the same moment, offended our own honor.... You are now our children. You have the same rights that we have, and that all Italians have, indeed there is no difference between them and you. Thus, cry out with all of our "fratelli d'Italia" (quoting from the Italian national anthem, "Brothers of Italy"): long live the King, long live Italy.[3]

The proclamation clearly had a respectful tone and intonations that bordered on paternalism, but it wasn't long before the inhabitants of Tripoli realized that the Italians not only failed to treat them as "children" and "brothers" and lacked all respect for their women, but also had no intention whatever of sharing power with them nor of acknowledging for them the offices and payments allowed them previously by the Ottoman administration. This also explains why even the most tepid and conciliatory of the Libyans soon went over to the camp of the die-hards, whom the Italians, wrongly, classed as "rebels."

The fragile truce was broken during the night of October 8 and the early morning of the 9th. A number of Turkish troops led an attack on the Fountains of Bu Meliana, which formed part of the weak line of defense set up by the Italians around the city of Tripoli and its oasis. This was, however, nothing more than a probing thrust, which the guns of the ships offshore immediately thwarted. Two days later, the full expeditionary force made its landing, and on October 12, the commander in chief of the Italian armed forces, General Carlo Caneva, established his headquarters in the old Turkish castle, the age-old symbol of power in the city. In the days that followed, as men, equipment, and vehicles were gradually sent ashore, the defensive line around Tripoli was considerably reinforced with new trenches and tens of thousands of sandbags.

The Turks' inactivity, outside of the Italian trenches, seemed to be complete, as Cesare Causa reported, "to such a degree that there were those who expected news that the enemy had evacuated Tripolitania from one moment to the next."[4] Back in Italy, for that matter, there were a great many who expected a blitzkrieg, a lightning war. On October 4, General Luigi Cadorna wrote in a letter to his son Raffaele: "I believe that this expedition will be a laughing matter, and that it will be a simple taking of possession, and little more. Turkey will give up as soon as it is able to do so with a shred of dignity."[5] Cadorna, like most Italian politicians, soldiers, and journalists, had failed to take into consideration the Arab factor, which would ultimately prove to be the catalyst for anti-Italian resistance.

2.

The news that Tripoli had been bombarded by an Italian fleet reached Mohamed Fekini in his home at Taredia, in the western Jebel. The naval attack, which could only be the preliminary phase of troop landings, disturbed and deeply embittered the chief of the Rojeban tribe, in part because this attack had taken place during the

holy month of Ramadan.[6] Mohamed Fekini's disquiet did not prevent him from immediately taking active measures. In fact, he wrote in his memoirs: "Before the Italian army landed, I established contact with the mountain chieftains to decide on a common strategy for resistance against our enemy."[7]

On October 4, 1911, while the bombardment of Tripoli was still underway, Mohamed Fekini had already moved to Qatis, with a few hundred horsemen, assembled, with the help of the Berber chieftain Suleiman el-Baruni, between Jadu and Zintan. The following day, this *mehalla* of mountain warriors descended to the prairies, reached Zanzur and Wershaffana, and learned that the notables of these towns in the immediate vicinity of Tripoli had already decided to surrender to the enemy. Two other cities, ez-Zauia and Sorman, had been swept into panic and were preparing to capitulate. "These shameful responses," Mohamed Fekini commented,

> surprised and disturbed us. And so we decided to head for Suani Ben Adem, where the Turkish soldiers had gathered, with their commander, Neshat Bey. But there another bitter surprise awaited us. The soldiers and their commander had already prepared a letter of surrender to be delivered to the Italian high command. And so I spoke to them and, feigning a great and genuine enthusiasm, I did my best to restore their confidence and urged them to join us in resistance. At the end of our conversation, we came to an agreement. We would challenge the foreign invaders and we would defend our homeland to the death.[8]

The Turks, on their part, had received from Istanbul the order to retreat to the mountains of Garian, which constituted a stronghold of strategic importance, in case of war. As we have seen, however, they were not particularly motivated, and they required a huge number of camels to transfer men and materiel. Since Mohamed Fekini and Suleiman el-Baruni were urging them to join in the resistance, the Turks asked to be provided with the necessary camels at the earliest possible time. The two chieftains did not have to be asked twice; they left the bulk of their mounted troops at Suani Ben Adem and, with a small escort, they set out for Garian, where they hoped to find the needed means of transport.

There were surprises still to come. Before nightfall, they met on the road two officials sent by the *kaymakam* of Garian, bearing a letter of surrender addressed to Hassuna Pasha, who had been reconfirmed mayor of Tripoli by the Italians. The missive bore the signatures of the *kaymakam* of Garian and other notables. The two functionaries were

placed under arrest, taken back to Suani Ben Adem, and handed over to the Turkish colonel Neshat Bey.

While awaiting a decision from the Turkish commander on the fate of the two functionaries from Garian, an argument broke out between Suleiman el-Baruni and Mohamed Fekini. The Berber chieftain announced that he refused to go to Garian, that in his opinion, the place was inhabited by traitors and liars; instead he suggested sending a delegation of notables to Tunisia and from there to France, in order to ask for the support of that great nation, in view of the fact that Arabs and Turks, unaided, would never be able to withstand the invaders. Mohamed Fekini replied that France would never give them any assistance for the simple fact that it was one of the group of European nations that had divided up the African continent, in Berlin, in 1885. He suggested, instead, holding out to the bitter end, allying themselves loyally with the Turks; otherwise, he stated, "the wrath of God and the scorn of all peoples will fall upon our heads."[9]

All those who witnessed the argument, which had been quite spirited, gave their support to Mohamed Fekini. As a result, it was decided to abandon the plan to climb up to Garian; it was decided instead that they would go to Yafran and Jadu, where they could hire camels and recruit as many fighters as possible. However reluctantly, Suleiman el-Baruni wound up agreeing with Fekini's plan. But the clash between these two individuals—between whom already there was no love lost—would be followed by other, far more violent disagreements, up to the definitive break in relations that came in 1913.

3. The recruitment of soldiers from the population of the Jebel was decidedly successful, in part because the order had arrived from the Sublime Porte as well to conduct a *jihad*, or holy war. This is how Mohamed Fekini recalls those events:

> I tried to assemble all of the fit men capable of fighting and I readied the material needed for war. I was accompanied in this mission by my brother Aboubaker Fekini, by Omar Arrab Bey, and all the inhabitants of my country. In the end, I was able to lead down into the prairies a great number of footsoldiers and horsemen, to the sound of beating drums. We crossed through the regions of Zintan, Yafran, el-Azizia, and we finally reached Suani Ben Adem, which was the assembly point for all fighters.[10]

According to various estimates, Mohamed Fekini, Suleiman el-Baruni and the representative Farhat Bey had succeeded, in just 15

days, in gathering and arming between 8,000 and 40,000 Arabs and Berbers.[11] This impressive mass of armed soldiers was moved during the night of October 22, from Suani Ben Adem to Gargaresh, Ayn Zara, and Suq el Juma'a, close to Tripoli; they managed to elude the notice of the Blèriot and Farman reconnaissance planes, despite the fact that this was significant troop deployment.

The Italian defensive lines, arranged along a semicircle extending over a radius of some five kilometers (two and one-half miles), were anchored, starting from the right, if looking from the Mediterranean Sea, at these principal positions: Fort Sultaniya, on the sea; at the mouth of the road to Gargaresh; the village of Bu Meliana; the old Turkish cavalry barracks; the cairn of Sidi Mesri; Fort Mesri; the highland of Henni; the village of Shara Shatt; and Fort Hamidie, at the sea. While for three-quarters of the distance, from west to south, it had been easy to mount a solid defensive line because the trenches overlooked the desert with palm groves behind them, to the east, in contrast, from Fort Mesri to the sea, the Italian lines ran through the oasis, in the midst of an authentic labyrinth of sunken paths and low clay walls, largely punctuated with obstacles of all sorts, such as palm trees, olive trees, dense shrubbery, houses, tombs, and wells.

"On Thursday 23 October," Mohamed Fekini writes,

> we launched our attack along a front that followed a curving line that stretched from al-Hamanji to Henni and to Suq el Juma'a. Our fighters showed great courage, facing every challenge and danger, careless even of the artillery of the Italian army. Unfortunately, they were not as well organized as their adversaries and had no notion of military discipline. I was obliged to intervene in order to put some order into the ranks and to impose discipline, which is more important and effective than numbers and courage. For that reason, we decided to appoint a competent and respected chief for every tribe.[12]

The first attack of the Arabo-Turks was launched after 7:00 in the morning, against the right wing of the Italian formation, between Fort Sultaniya and the road to Gargaresh. But it was actually a diversion because an hour later, much larger masses of fighters began hurling themselves against the center of the lines, between the wells of Bu Meliana and Fort Mesri. Even this assault, however, was meant only to keep the Italians immobilized in their trenches. The real attack—the one that Neshat Bey, Suleiman el-Baruni, and Mohamed Fekini counted on to break through the enemy lines and head for Tripoli—was unleashed at 7:45 AM on the left flank of the defensive lines,

in the very heart of the oasis, between Fort Mesri and Shara Shatt: positions that were manned primarily by the Bersaglieri of the 11th regiment.

This final attack had been planned and readied with great care because it called for a simultaneous assault on the Italian lines, both from the front and from the rear. At Shara Shatt, not only were regular Ottoman troops fighting alongside Arab and Berber soldiers who had come down from the mountains, but the entire population of the oasis and part of the population of Tripoli were fighting as well. This was, in other words, the very same general insurrection that the diplomat Carlo Galli had so obstinately ruled out as a possibility, firm in his belief that the inhabitants of Tripolitania would never form an alliance with the Turks. But he was wrong. The revolt involved men and women, old people and children, and it was as ruthless as any rebellion that mixed not only xenophobia but also religious fanaticism. The triggering event, though, was the blameworthy behavior of the Italian Bersaglieri toward Arab women, a clear contradiction of the paternalistic reassurances contained in the proclamation issued by Rear Admiral Borea Ricci.

The first frontal attack of the Arabo-Turks was driven back, though with considerable difficulty. Soon, however, the Bersaglieri of the 4th and 5th company were hit from behind as well. Caught in the crossfire, the Italians stop obeying their officers' commands and sought in vain to open a gap to retreat to Tripoli. They scattered and were cut down one by one. A few squadrons attempted to surrender, but the Arabs weren't taking prisoners. Felice Piccioli, one of the few survivors of the battle, described the field of battle in these terms: "Our dead at Shara Shatt lie, unburied, in every direction: many have been nailed to the date palms like Jesus Christ. The enemy stitched many of their eyes shut with twine; many others were buried up to the neck, only their heads are visible; a great many had their genitals sliced away."[13]

It is calculated that no fewer than 5,000 Libyans took part in the fighting at Shara Shatt and Henni, belonging to nearly all the tribes of Gefara and the Jebel, despite the initial indecision and betrayals denounced by Mohamed Fekini. The defeat of the Italians, however, failed to be converted into an irreparable defeat for one reason alone. At a certain point, the fury of the Arabs seemed to have been appeased and, around 5 p.m., fighting began to die out along all the fronts.

4. While bitter fighting continued at Henni, Fort Mesri, and Shara Shatt, in Tripoli, around 12:30 in the early afternoon, panic began to spread, both because of the reports of the rout filtering back from the front and because of the proliferation of sniper attacks in the streets of the city itself. In fact, one of the Italian journalists, Aldo Chierici, reported: "It is actually the city Arabs who are attacking isolated soldiers, or else they shoot at them from their windows. A Carabinieri warrant officer dropped to the ground right before my eyes with a bullet in his back. A Bersagliere was buying lemons; he was stabbed by the lemon vendor himself."[14] Fearing a wider uprising in the city, General Carlo Caneva, commander in chief of the expeditionary force, asked Rear Admiral Borea Ricci to land a few detachments of sailors.

On the afternoon of October 23, while the panic was beginning to subside in Tripoli, the Italians recovered from their surprise and began to undertake the merciless reprisal that went on for a number of days; that reprisal would be the object of harsh condemnation from a number of foreign journalists accredited to the military command of Tripoli. According to their reports, more than 4,000 Arabs had been killed in five days. To protest against these massacres, a number of foreign correspondents, including the special correspondents of the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, and the *Lokalanzeiger*, handed in their press cards to General Caneva and left Libya.[15]

The Arabs who managed to avoid execution by firing squad or by hanging were deported to houses of detention in Italy.[16] This radical decision was made by Giolitti in the aftermath of Shara Shatt and conveyed by telegram to Caneva, with these words: "As for the rebels that have been arrested but who have not been executed there in Libya, I will send them to the Tremiti Islands, in the Adriatic Sea, to live under house arrest. The Tremiti Islands can accommodate more than four hundred detainees. I shall send there a general inspector of public safety to oversee their placement."[17] But the Arabs that Caneva embarked, between October 25 and 30, were far more than 400. There were, to be exact, 3,425 of them. For that reason, they were also sent to 25 other penitentiaries, especially on Ustica and Ponza, and in Caserta, Gaeta, and Favignana.

A great many of these deportees, who came from every walk in life and whose ages ranged from one to ninety, would never return to the land of their birth. Paolo Valera, the only journalist who would

manage to visit a number of the places of detention, described the inhuman treatment that was inflicted upon the inmates:

> The greatest number of them are in Ustica. A disease-ridden place. A stench-ridden place. An unhealthy place. Cholera has killed off more than five hundred of them in just a few weeks' time.[18] They are living in such deprivation that many more lives have been lost. No country has treated prisoners of war as Italy has done. It has fed them as it feeds its prison inmates, with 600 grams (less than a pound and a half) of bread and a tin of disgusting soup. Their beds were grimy straw, tossed on the ground, scattered over stones or bricks, as we do for animals.[19]

Even now, nearly a century later, their ordeal is remembered in Libya with anguish and has become one of Libya's grievances against Italy.[20]

5. Despite the massacres and the deportations, which unquestionably weakened the Arabo-Turkish alliance, in the early hours of October 26, Neshat Bey, Suleiman el-Baruni, and Mohamed Fekini led their men toward the Italian lines and launched a new attack against the southern front, between Bu Meliana, Sidi Mesri, and the highland of Henni. They were at first driven back all along the line, but the Arabo-Turks finally managed to open a breach, around 8:00 in the morning, not far from the cavalry barracks, and succeeded in taking possession of the house of Gemal Bey and overwhelming detachments of the 84th infantry regiment. "The enemy," wrote Aldo Chierici, who went to the site of the battle, "in a magnificent thrust, with admirable tenacity, reached the trenches, and went past them. Turks and Arabs, over a 500 meter section of the front, invaded the field and celebrated their victory."[21]

The account of the journalist Aldo Chierici is confirmed by Mohamed Fekini, who writes in his memoirs: "Our fighters…occupied the fortifications of Henni after a fierce battle, with copious blood shed on both sides. This forced the Italians to retreat with their cannons."[22] In these hand-to-hand clashes, 40 mountain men from the tribe of the Rojeban, the one led by Mohamed Fekini, also lost their lives.[23]

The battle was truly tenaciously fought, with furious combat and heavy losses on both sides. So much so that General Caneva was forced to toss into the fray the reserves of the 84th regiment. But

it took the coordinated fire of the heavy artillery of the ships offshore and the land-based artillery to stop the Arabo-Turks. The situation, however, was so critical that on October 28, Caneva ordered the entire eastern front drawn back, abandoning to the enemy the forts of Mesri and Hamidie and the very important position of Henni. Puffed up with pride at his victory, Suleiman el-Baruni sent the following telegram to the notables of Ghadames: "After a terrible fight against the Italian troops, we have driven them headlong from Henni and from Fort Mesri, as well as from other positions in the Sahel. Tomorrow, October 29, we shall advance against Tripoli and, with God's help, we shall enter that city victoriously. Give the good news to our brethren."[24]

The Arabo-Turks would not enter Tripoli on October 29 nor on the days that followed. But Caneva, even though he had 40,000 men at his disposal, decided to make no effort to break the siege, which prompted surprise, disappointment, and anger, both in Tripoli and back in Italy. Caneva's reasons for this period of inaction, which was to last for more than a month, are summarized in a report that he sent on November 6 to the Minister of War Paolo Spingardi. After pointing out that the hostility of the Arabs had been an unexpected factor and that their surprising alliance with the Turks had entirely transformed the larger picture, Caneva expressed the opinion that it was advisable to give precedence, for the moment, to "political action as opposed to purely, or prevalently military action." He therefore suggested making up for lost time by attempting, with a skillfully orchestrated propaganda campaign, to separate the Arabs from the Turks, thus avoiding any further deepening of "the ditch of blood that we have unfortunately found ourselves obliged to dig between ourselves and our future subjects." With further reference to the "cholera outbreak that is now smouldering among the troops," General Caneva recommended for the moment not to engage in a full-blown offensive.[25]

The cholera vibrio, or bacterium, had already been present in Tripoli for a few months, especially in the wells of the oasis and in the dates that grew there, and it had killed many Libyan deportees during the sea voyage to Italy.[26] Cholera took its first Italian victim, a sailor, on October 13. In the three months that followed, the disease killed 7 officers and 369 soldiers. The epidemic reached its peak in December and spread, as well, to the Turkish camp of Suani Ben Adem and the Arab camp of Ain Zara.

In early November, Mohamed Fekini fell sick as well. “Upon the advice of the doctors,” he writes in his memoirs,

> I was transported to the Jebel. My cousin Omar Arrab Bey took my place as commander of our troops, and of the following tribes—Rojeban, Zintan, and Riaina—as well as those commanded by Suleiman el-Baruni. After four days of travel, I reached Sorman and stayed in the home of the mayor, Effendi Obaida ben Zakri. Eight days later, I asked my comrades to take me back to my home, in the Rojeban region, and there I remained until I was well again.[27]

At the beginning of April 1912, Mohamed Fekini, finally fully recovered, sent a document, translated into Turkish as well, to Colonel Neshat Bey, to the Libyan representatives for Tripolitania and to a number of chieftains. He had spent a good deal of time thinking matters over, and this document was the product of his reflections. It was broken down into ten points, and it shows that Fekini was not only a military leader but also a statesman of some considerable substance. In point 1, for instance, he wrote: “The enemy always tends to occupy the center of the *vilayet*, remaining behind his forts and trenches, where he holds fast. It will take a great store of patience, new fighting strategies, and especially a large number of soldiers. We must go and find those soldiers in all our regions, even the most farflung.” With reference to this need for further recruitment efforts, Fekini noted in point 5:

> It is necessary to inform all the furthest regions of the situation. We should find out why no fighters have come from Fezzan, Orfella, Sirte, the oases di Al Jufrah, or Nalut, or Ghadames. I believe that we can attribute the responsibility for this negligence to their chieftains. We should, therefore, send men there to recruit fighters according to a previously established quota.[28]

Continuing his analysis of the situation, Mohamed Fekini wrote in point 7: “Finally, it is important to establish an understanding between civilians and soldiers, who must live and act in complete harmony, constituting a solid and united front.” Fekini concluded his thoughts with the following words:

> I believe that these suggestions need to take into account, on the one hand, the current circumstances of the war, and on the other hand, the Arabic aspect of this anti-foreign resistance campaign. I thank you

> in advance for setting forth this advice to the highest officers of the Caliphate. I invoke the name of the Prophet to aid us in our fight, and I pray to Allah to guide us along the right path.[29]

Mohamed Fekini was correct in his observations. There had been too many unjustified defections and excessive squabbling. With the experience that he had gained from 30 years of service, at the lowest and highest levels, as a faithful and enlightened servant of the Ottoman Empire and of his own people, he had no reluctance to set forth his views or offer suggestions, concerning not only military strategies but also the need for a seamless cooperation between soldiers and civilians. He also stressed the importance of "guaranteeing public safety from the thieves and criminals who are sowing terror in many districts, as a result of the culpable neglect of incompetent functionaries, negligent police officials, and excessively indulgent military leaders."[30]

This document by Mohamed Fekini offers further evidence that the Italian authorities had nothing but prejudiced views toward the Arabs and that they had a total lack of understanding of just how civilized their adversaries actually were. While in the Italian trenches around Tripoli, hatred was growing exponentially, drowning all other feelings and deforming the soldiers' views of reality, deforming the Arabo-Turks into monsters and demons and ultimately fueling the pleasure of killing, Mohamed Fekini was imparting a lesson of wisdom and civility, endowing the Libyan resistance movement with a substantial element of nobility and legitimacy.[31]

3

The Clash with Suleiman el-Baruni

1. In order to break the siege of the Arabo-Turks upon Tripoli, the chief of the Italian army's general staff, General Alberto Pollio, sent increasingly massive reinforcements to Caneva between November and December 1911. The specific breakdown was as follows: 55,000 men from all branches of the armed services, 84 pieces of field artillery, 42 mountain cannons, 28 siege cannons, 8,300 beasts of burden, 1,500 transport wagons, new squadrons of reconnaissance airplanes and bombers, and a certain number of poison gas grenades that were not used. At the end of 1911, there were 103,000 Italian soldiers with 24 generals present in Libya. Italy had not fielded such a large army since 1866, during the Third War of Independence. And yet, as General Gustavo Pesenti observed, however imposing this army might be, it was not that overwhelming "in comparison with the vastness of the theater of operations...and the exceedingly noble enemy, at once present and absent, elusive, scattered along a vast coastline extending over 1,800 kilometers (about 1,100 miles), and master of the interior."[1]

At the same time that the Italian expeditionary force was receiving reinforcements, the Arabo-Turkish camp was also being reinforced to a considerable degree, especially across the borders with Egypt and Tunisia. According to intelligence that General Caneva had received, in the period between October 1911 and February 1912, 300 Turkish officers had crossed the Tunisian border, along with large contingents of Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Syrian, Algerian, and Yemeni volunteers. Ample resupplies of provisions and weapons also crossed both frontiers, particularly the Tunisian border. At Regdalin, in Libyan territory, a huge dump of foodstuffs was established, supplied weekly by caravans of 1,000 to 1,500 camels. These substantial

supplies allowed the Turkish command to recruit increasing numbers of men so that by the end of 1911, there may have been as many as 30,000 Arab volunteers in Tripolitania and 20,000 to 25,000 in Cyrenaica. All of them received a regular salary, and the families of fallen men were given a monthly sum—a sort of survivor's pension. In November 1911, the Turkish-Arab leadership in Tripolitania was as follows: Neshat Bey, governor of the *vilayet* and supreme military commander; Fathy Bey, who had recently entered Libya secretly from Istanbul, as chief of military operations; and Suleiman el-Baruni and Omar Arrab Bey, chiefs of the Arabo-Berber *mehallas*.[2]

In his memoirs, with his customary frankness that sometimes borders on brutality, Mohamed Fekini had this to say about the aid that Turkey and other Muslim nations were sending Libya:

> This reinforced the field of the resistance movement, in terms of numbers of fighters and equipment. Unfortunately, however, the tribal chieftains, when they saw all the cash in the treasury, developed an array of stratagems in collusion with the Turkish military leaders to steal this money on behalf of their various clans. The vilest of these accursed petty thieves were Suleiman el-Baruni and Sassi Khazam, who had been put in charge of the distribution of provisions. Both betrayed the trust of their Muslim brothers, and especially of their Tunisian and Egyptian neighbors, who had been particularly generous with their financial contributions. They had been mistaken about Suleiman el-Baruni, and had shown great esteem and respect for him before they discovered his faults and his duplicity. In reality, Baruni was a great menace in the heart of the Muslim army. His mendacity provided the enemy a great service at a low cost, because he had dealt a murderous blow to the enthusiastic esprit of the fighters, who were now disheartened.[3]

Continuing his attack upon his former ally, Mohamed Fekini explained that the Turkish military leaders "had maintained silence in order to preserve unity and solidarity during the war. For my part, however, I could not remain silent and I have always urged the commander (Neshat Bey) to uproot the cause of the corruption."[4] To justify his bitterness and disillusionment, Fekini explained that Suleiman el-Baruni, exploiting his close ties with the Turkish supreme command, had rid himself of Omar Arrab Bey by sending him away from the front and stranding him in Fassatu with the job of *kaymakam*. Subseqently, he had persuaded Colonel Neshat to make the Ibadite Sassi Khazam the treasurer of all the *mehallas* of the Jebel and to

promote another Berber, Musa Grada, to the office of mayor of Gasr Yafran. The plundering that was carried out, along with these political maneuvers on behalf of the Berbers as a group—Fekini went on-could hardly help but offend the Arab majority of fighting men, and in protest they began to avoid combat.

"Once the enemy discovered what has going on in our camp," Fekini wrote, "he hastened to attack our weakened fronts. . . . And behold, the Muslims, who had been at the very gates of the besieged city, suddenly found themselves, through el-Baruni's misdeeds, in headlong retreat, and were forced to withdraw all the way to Suani Ben Adem. . . . Despite my illness, I made a special effort to gather the men and the camels in order to stave off further disaster. I also telegraphed or wrote to the authorities in Ghadames, Nalut, and Nijad, asking them immediately to send their men to the front, to come in aid of their brothers."[5]

Based on the documents now in our possession, it is difficult to say whether ultimate responsibility for the defeat of Zanzur can be laid to the devious maneuvers of Suleiman el-Baruni. There can be no doubt, however, that General Caneva enjoyed the use of an efficient intelligence service, and he could not have failed to be aware of the growing conflict among Arabs and Berbers in the opposing camp. By attacking the oasis of Zanzur, a genuine thorn in the right flank of the Italian formation, Caneva also hoped to break the supply lines from Tunisia. In the military action commanded by General Pietro Frugoni and by his youthful chief of staff Pietro Badoglio, the future Marshal of Italy, no fewer than 14,000 men and 50 cannons were deployed, along with the covering fire of the guns aboard three warships offshore and the support of airplanes and dirigibles. Combat began at 4:40 a.m. on June 8, 1912, and ended at 4:00 in the afternoon, when the Arabo-Turks were obliged to retreat all along the front. The Italians had suffered casualties of 330 men; their adversaries had lost 1130 to death, and perhaps as many were wounded.

2. The clash between Mohamed Fekini and Suleiman el-Baruni was only beginning, and it was already reigniting age-old resentments that had been handed down from father to son. The Arabs could not tolerate the presence of the Berbers, especially in the Jebel. The Berbers, in turn, boasted that they had first settled in Libya several centuries earlier than the Arabs. The Italian aggression of October 1911 had momentarily laid to rest the animosity dividing the two ethnic groups, creating conditions for an alliance, but that was unlikely

to last. Suleiman el-Baruni was certainly a good patriot, as well as a man of considerable learning,[6] but he was unwilling to share fame, honor, and power with others. It was also a well-known fact that he was unscrupulous in achieving his aims, and more than once in his long career of resistance fighter and activist, he had also been accused of embezzlement.[7]

For many years, Suleiman el-Baruni had been pursuing his dream of establishing an autonomous entity within the *vilayet* of Tripolitania, to be run by Berbers. Although he was elected representative for the Jebel of Fassatu in 1908, his relations with Turkey had always been rather stormy. In fact, he had been thrown in jail on three separate occasions for claiming that Libya had every right to free itself from Ottoman dominion and establish an independent republic. Suleiman el-Baruni was too intelligent to think that the Arabo-Turks had any real chance of driving the Italians back into the sea. But he was also sufficiently intelligent to understand that by managing the conflict alongside the Turks, at the highest level, he would gain an opportunity at the war's end to play his card and negotiate with the Italians for the autonomy that he had failed to win from the Sublime Porte.

This explains why he did everything he could to rid himself of those individuals who might prove to be hindrances to his ambitious plan—beginning with his brother, Mohamed Fekini; the representative for the Jebel Ahmed Fadel; and the other representative for Tripoli, Farhat Bey. As we have seen, however, these maneuvers had not passed unobserved by Mohamed Fekini, who had warned Turkish commander Neshat Bey to be on his guard. That warning had fallen on deaf ears, however. Suleiman el-Baruni, in fact, continued to implement his plan, calling into question the honesty or worth of the old representatives and successfully persuading the Turkish high command to appoint a number of Berber notables to the key offices of the *vilayet*.

Weary of witnessing what he believed to be authentic abuses of power against the Sunni Arab majority, Mohamed Fekini sent a long letter to Colonel Neshat Bey in May 1912. In that letter, he denounced once again the devious maneuvers of Suleiman el-Baruni. "Alas," he wrote at a certain point, with extreme harshness, "he has done nothing but to deceive your vigilance, influence you with his lies, and you, you have forgotten your duty to be impartial and have discounted the Arabs and the fundamental role that they have played in this holy war. . . . You are responsible before Allah, before the governor, and before all the faithful. You must persuade el-Baruni to put an end to

this corruption, you must tend to the interests of the citizens and their unity."[8]

Mohamed Fekini, however, must not have placed much reliance upon the commander in chief of the Turkish armed forces because, at the very same time, he was sending letters to the Caliph, to the Turkish prime minister, to the Ministers of War and of the Interior, and to a number of Libyan leaders; in these letters, he reiterated his charges against Suleiman el-Baruni. In the letter that he sent to the prime minister, Fekini took the opportunity to point out that the morale of the Turkish troops, at the time of the Italian landings, had been bordering on complete failure: "We traveled to Suani Ben Adem to meet and aid the Turkish soldiers and their commander Neshat. This officer and his troops had fallen into a state of disquiet and despair. I encouraged them to hold out with us and fight against the invasion; at the same time we issued a call for volunteers from all the tribes in the *vilayet*."[9]

Despite the maneuvers of Suleiman el-Baruni, which had certainly weakened the Arabo-Turkish front, the Italians were still anchored along the coastline, unable to push inland. Toward the end of July 1912, 10 months after the landings in Tripolitania, General Caneva had been able to create nothing more than a few modest bridgeheads: at Tripoli, Khoms, Misratah, Bu Kemmasch, and Sidi Said. But in no sector had he managed to penetrate any further inland than 15 kilometers (10 miles). Turkey, in contrast, was showing no signs of fatigue. It was indifferent to the naval raids in the Red Sea, the attacks at the crucial nerve center of the Dardanelles, and the occupation in May 1912 of Rhodes and the other islands in the Dodecanese.

Although he had committed an army of 100,000 men in Libya and ordered the Italian navy to attack Turkey on its own territory, Giolitti soon became aware that military might, alone, would not be sufficient to end the conflict. In fact, he was so convinced of this that at the end of May, he authorized the financier Giuseppe Volpi, the future governor of Tripolitania and perhaps the most profound expert on the Ottoman Empire, to travel to Constantinople. Officially, Volpi was traveling to Turkey to tend to his own interests as president of the Società Commerciale d'Oriente, but in actual fact, he had been entrusted with the mission of starting "useful conversations" with the most influential Turkish ministers,[10] such as the minister of war, Mahmoud Chewker Pasha; the minister for foreign affairs, Hassim Bey; and the grand vizier, Said Pasha. Following these conversations,

the two governments agreed to start secret negotiations in neutral Switzerland.

In truth, both Italy and Turkey were keenly interested in putting an end to the conflict. Even though in Libya, the Arabo-Turks were fighting every step of the Italian advance on all fronts, they were beginning to sense a great shortage of weapons and munitions, to the point that they were forced to reload the cartridges that had already been fired. On July 21, the commander in chief of the Arabo-Turkish forces in Tripolitania, Neshat Bey, informed his superiors in Istanbul with a telegram explaining that "at present we have run out of provisions and cartridges for properly defending ourselves; we have just 17,000 rifles of various models.... I believe that if we received immediately, or as quickly as possible, munitions and 50,000 Mausers, the enemy could not take a step outside of the Sahel. If that is not possible, I believe that the best approach is to resolve the situation through diplomacy, putting an end to the useless shedding of innocent blood."[11]

The situation was slightly better in Cyrenaica, thanks to the remarkable military skills of Enver Pasha and the uninterrupted supplies from Egypt. On November 25, 1912, Enver Pasha wrote in his diary: "Finally! The die is cast! And so I am leaving Cyrenaica, my domain, a place that has become so dear to me, and a position that is in any case relatively independent, and I am returning to Istanbul to resume service there as a colonel. According to the latest dispatch from Istanbul, there is no chance of remaining here any longer.... Here everything was about to bear fruit and the cumulative results of this year of activity promised to produce the finest outcome. I had an entire populace behind me, and they awaited only a gesture from the Great Sheik to perform any sacrifice that was asked of them."[12]

Though Cyrenaica might have held out for a while still to come, the Sublime Porte hastened to complete its negotiations with Italy and on October 18, 1912, signed a peace treaty in Ouchy. What Giolitti portrayed as a simple "military stroll in the park" had demanded of Italy a year of warfare; a cash cost of about 1.7 billion lire; and a cost in human lives of 3432 soldiers—1483 in combat and 1949 from disease. And the fact still remained that Libya had to be conquered if, as they feared, once the Turks departed, the war would only be carried on by the Arabs, who had much deeper motivations. The complete occupation of Libyan territory, in fact, would not be achieved until 20 years later, in 1932.

4

Interval of Peace

1. The news that the Italians and the Turks had signed a peace treaty at Ouchy on October 18, 1912, arrived in Libya like a bolt out of the blue and, as Mustafa Hamed Rahuma noted, caused "alarm and confusion among the rank and file of the *mujahideen* formations" and brought a split in the internal front. "The Turkish withdrawal of troops and administrative structure inflicted a further devastating blow to the Arab resistance movement."[1]

The atmosphere of total uncertainty that developed in Tripolitania following the annuncement of peace was confirmed by Mohamed Fekini as well. "The Ottoman commander," he writes in his memoirs, "retreated with his troops to Zauia el-Garbia. The people are bewildered and the notables assembled at el-Azizia to discuss the situation and decide on what to do."[2]

Before leaving Tripoli with his 2,600 soldiers,[3] Colonel Neshat Bey assembled the principal Arab and Berber chiefs and delivered this speech to them:

> A peace treaty has been signed, the Turkish government can no longer provide any official aid to you for your continuation of the war, but there is someone who can: the Committee for Union and Progress. I can make available to you the victuals that have already been ordered and 20,000 Turkish liras; other sums will be sent to you from the committees of Tunis and Egypt. I cannot give you munitions, but I can let you take them, likewise with rifles, and I will report that you simply carried them off.[4]

After listening to Neshat Bey's words of farewell, the chiefs and other notables met at el-Azizia. Here, they debated at length on the

proposals set forth by the Ottoman governor and the proper decisions to be made but without reaching any agreement. "The inhabitants of the coastal region and the Garian," Mohamed Fekini specified,

> were in favor of a general surrender. Those of the Jebel, Arabs and Ibadites, in agreement with the southern Arabs and part of the inhabitants of the Orfella region, decided on the other hand to retreat to the area around el-Azizia and continue the resistance.[5]

The one who advocated continuing the war more fervently than any of the others was the Berber Suleiman el-Baruni, who said that he felt certain of the support of the Ottoman government and the solidarity of the Islamic world at large. He pointed out, moreover, that even if their resistance was destined eventually to come to an end, it "would in any case have significant moral effects and it would pave the way for far more advantageous material concessions."[6]

As we know, Suleiman el-Baruni had been cultivating for years his dream of a Berber principality in Tripolitania and, in the situation that had come into being with the departure of the Turks, he glimpsed an ideal opportunity to try to achieve his ambitious project. Mohamed Fekini had tried in vain to reason with him, reminding him in a subsequent conversation in Gasr Yafran, that the inhabitants of Tripolitania were "poor and unarmed. And how could it be that these men, without weapons and living from hand to mouth in the best of times, would succeed in fighting against the Great Italy when even Turkey was unable to do so?"[7]

It was unlikely, however, that the carefully reasoned words of Fekini would be sufficient to stop Suleiman el-Baruni, who was by now determined to implement his plan, regardless of the means or contrivances employed. He certainly stood head and shoulders above all the other Libyan chiefs, in terms of culture; familiarity with the tricks and games of politics; and most important, imagination, while those other chiefs were still anchored to the microcosm of their own villages. He outdid them as well in his shamelessness, to such a degree that he presented, as Mohamed Fekini wrote with undisguised indignation, "a man who claimed to be the sheik of the Sufis of Anatolia and who was secretly carrying an order from the Sultan appointing el-Baruni as the supreme leader of the armies of the *jihad*."[8]

On the strength of this investiture and confident that he could lay his hands on the 20,000 Turkish liras and the 12,000 bags of victuals stocked at Ben Gardane and left behind by the departing Turkish high

command, the Berber leader hurled himself impetuously into the fray, certain that he could drag everyone else—Berbers and Arabs—with him into the renewed holy war. Mohamed Fekini, however, refused to be deceived and intimidated. Quite to the contrary, he counterattacked, issuing an appeal to all the people of the Jebel, urging them to wait before resuming their warfare to learn the response of the Italian authorities, who had been asked to allow them "to remain independent, with an autonomous regime like the one in place in Tunisia and in Egypt."[9] At the same time, Fekini wrote to Neshat Bey, urging him not to hand over to Suleiman el-Baruni neither money nor victuals. Despite this message, the colonel, who was by now about to leave Libya, responded on November 18 with these terse words:

> We have left on the site, for the sons of the martyrs, part of the goods and the victuals that we have succeeded in transporting here. We know nothing of the goods that may have remained at Ben Gardane, and in any case we have not given anything to anyone.[10]

Neshat Bey knew that his words were false, but, in his defense, it should be said that by this point, he was probably quite irritated at the continuous squabbling of the Libyans.

Despite the efforts of Mohamed Fekini and his coalition to stop him, Suleiman el-Baruni succeeded in taking possession of all the resources that were abandoned by the Turks. Immediately thereafter, he withdrew with his followers to the highlands of Gasr Yafran to see how events would unfold. Here is how the Berber chieftain described the achievement of his long-cherished dream:

> With the signing of a peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Italy, and once he had officially received the news from both governments that His Majesty our Sultan was according to the inhabitants of Tripolitania complete and entire administrative autonomy,[11] we decided to preserve that autonomy in agreement with the inhabitants, who in turn invited me to accept the chairmanship and establish a government. Many written requests, signed by the natives, were presented to me expressing this desire; I willingly accepted these requests and hastened to telegraph the news to the major powers and the most respected newspapers. I then proceeded to found a government modeled on those guided by civil laws and regulations, appointing *mutasarrifs*, *kaymakams*, *mudirs*, *cadis*, *muftis,* and the rest of the necessary complement of functionaries. I formed a regiment of soldiers, consisting of footsoldiers, horsemen, and Meharists, with European-style

> uniforms. I organized a far-flung postal system covering the entire territory. I set up telegraph and telephone offices, extending all the way to the Tunisian border. I established a combat zone facing the Italian forces.[12]

Of this miniature state, Suleiman el-Baruni had himself immediately proclaimed emir, triggering the fury of the governor in Tripoli, General Ragni, who had in the meantime successfully began his drive into Tripolitania, occupying Suani Ben Adem, el-Azizia; and Funduq Ben Ghashir, the three strongholds of the previously existing Arab-Turkish defensive structure before Tripoli.

2. While Suleiman el-Baruni was busily building his fragile and short-lived state, Mohamed Fekini met with his followers, and together they analyzed the situation that had come into being with the departure of the Turks. Fekini writes,

> We were faced with only two possibilities: either we could accept the new state of occupation or we could abandon our country and emigrate elsewhere. If we had chosen the first solution, no option remained but to go to Tripoli, as the other representatives of the *vilayet* had done. In the end we agreed to send four delegates for every district to Tripoli. And so I went to Tripoli with the four delegates from Fassatu.[13]

In the past, Fekini had gone to the capital of Tripolitania hundreds of times, at the summons of the Ottoman governors. It was hardly a daunting journey for people accustomed to spending days at a time in the saddle. This time, however, was different: he was going to Tripoli to surrender to the Italian authorities. The very word "surrender" filled him with disgust and anguish. And he hoped that his former enemies would not impose humiliating ceremonies upon him. He longed for a dignified reconciliation, even though he knew that he had been identified in Tripoli as an unyielding adversary, one of those responsible for the massacres of Henni and Shara Shatt.

There were no humiliating ceremonies. Quite the opposite. The Italian authorities had announced "a pact of reconciliation," and, for the moment, they seemed determined to respect that pact.[14] Mohamed Fekini and his comrades were welcomed cordially at Zauia el-Garbia, which was the Italian forward position, by none other than General Clemente Lequio, the officer who would eliminate the short-lived domain of Suleiman el-Baruni a few months later. The next day, Mohamed Fekini and his comrades continued on to Tripoli where

they were the guests of Ahmed el-Muntasser, in whose home they met with the Libyan representatives Ferhat Bey, Muktar Bey Koobar, el-Marid Bey Ladjoucha, and dozens of other notables.

In the meanwhile, at the Tripoli Castle, a solemn ceremony was being prepared. Among the participants would be the Italian minister for colonies, Pietro Bertolini; the representative of the sultan, Shemsi Eddin Bey; and the governor of Tripolitania, General Ottavio Ragni. Ragni, Mohamed Fekini writes,

> confirmed that the pact of reconciliation had been signed and confirmed, that Italy stood ready to rebuild Tripoli, and that he was willing to answer any and all questions that the notables might choose to put to him; he expressed his friendship for them.[15]

Everything, therefore, seemed to be proceeding in the proper direction, but when the notables of the Jebel sent Governor Ragni a petition asking that Mohamed Fekini be assigned the position of *mutasarrif* of the Jebel, the general replied that "the Italian state had suppressed the position of *mutasarrjf*."[16] Let him therefore be satisfied with the title of *kaymakam* of Fassatu. For Fekini, it was a glaring demotion, since he had served during the Ottoman period in the position of *mutasarrif*, which constituted the highest potential privilege for a Libyan. All the same, he did not protest, even though it was evident that the Italian authorities were paying only lip service to the concept of true cooperation with the Arabs. For that matter, this was hardly an isolated case of discrimination. Even though the peace treaty specified that "the individual prisoners and deportees will be immediately freed,"[17] as of December 31, 1912, no Libyan had been freed or repatriated. And in the Italian prison camps, they continued to suffer and die. As the poet Fudil Hasin ash-Shalmani, who was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment and confined at Favignana, recalled,

> *We are locked into small cells, cramped,*
> *Without sunlight*
> *The iron gates are shut tight.*
> *And everywhere I look, I see nothing but Italians.*[18]

Mohamed Fekini had no foolish illusions. Ragni's promises were not, after all, so different from the promises made by Borea Ricci. For the moment, however, in the absence of viable alternatives, common sense suggested patience. Once again, he suppressed his bitter

disappointment and placed his work as an administrator at the service of his people. He appointed, in fact, for every district of the Jebel Fassatu, a judge, a mufti, and two teachers; and he decided to apply shari'a (strict Koranic law) throughout his jurisdiction.

Other chieftains and notables in Gefara and the Jebel nourished the same mistrust and concerns as Mohamed Fekini toward the Italians. All the same, the majority of those leaders had decided to go to Tripoli, however reluctantly, to surrender to the Italian authorities. Along with them went 6,054 soldiers. There was one fact, however, that worried Governor Ragni. The weapons handed over numbered only 778, and of those weapons, only 459 were combat ones. It was clear, then, that some of them believed that it was not advisable to turn in the weapons that could be useful because the truce might well come to an end.

3. While this sad pilgrimage toward Tripoli Castle, the ancient symbol of Turkish power—now an emblem of Italian might—was taking place, Suleiman el-Baruni did his best to consolidate his positions in the mountainous region of Garian. At the beginning of 1913, he commanded 3,500 men, deployed in three camps: 1,000 men at Rabta el-Garbia, 2,000 men at Asabaa, and 500 at Bir el-Ghnem. Among the chieftains supporting him were no longer only Berber notables, such as Musa Grada, Sassi Khazam, Khalifa ben Askar, and Yusuf Cherbisc but also such leading Arabs as Mohammed Ben Abdalla; Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi; Abubaker Ghirza; and Ali es-Shanta, who had been won over by Suleiman el-Baruni's powerful personality. El-Baruni had raised the red and green banner of revolt with the motto, "Allah has promised you great plunder and prey, which you will take."

Well aware that he was playing the most important card in his life, el-Baruni was not content merely to widen the scope of consensus for his actions and to build up his supplies of weapons and provisions; he also took care to send a delegation to Rome, consisting of Musa Grada and Ali es-Shanta, to present a series of demands to the Minister for Colonies Bertolini. These demands can be summarized as follows: 1) autonomy for the Jebel and the western coastal plain, with a capital at Zauia el-Garbia, ancient home of the Berbers; 2) should it prove impossible to win autonomy, it might be possible to accept a form of protectorate not unlike what Great Britain had conceded to Egypt; 3) should even this proposal meet with rejection, it was necessary at the very least to win the accordance of some form of special privilege

for the Berber territories, along with greater liberty than that given to other regions of Tripolitania.

By now, certain that he had the situation well in hand, Suleiman el-Baruni did his best to persuade other Arab chieftains to join him, both by distributing food—especially valuable in a year of drought and famine—and by carrying out acts of extreme violence. He took advantage of the long sojourn in Tripoli of Mohamed Fekini and other Arab chieftains of the Jebel to destroy their homes and plunder their herds. In the days that followed, he laid siege to the village of Taredia, where Fekini had established a garrison with 600 of his men and had Mohammed Ben Abdalla, chief of the Ulad Bu Sef, not intervened as peacemaker, on the strength of his great authority, there would inevitably have been a ferocious battle.

Another method that Suleiman el-Baruni employed was to send threatening letters to the Arab chieftains who had taken part in the ceremony of reconciliation held at Tripoli. To the former deputy for Garian, Muktar Bey Koobar, for instance, he wrote,

> You have passed from the legal and religious authority of the Turks to the yoke of a people with whom you have nothing in common save for the fact that they also belong to the human race, a status that I hardly think they care to acknowledge in you, since they consider you as nothing more than a vendor, while they are buyers, indeed, to their minds, you are merely a slave, and they are your masters.... Know then that among the Italians there are enlightened people, who know how to value men according to their actions. And know that to those people there is no crime greater than that of selling out one's country in exchange for cash.[19,20]

But what Suleiman el-Baruni failed to realize, in his delirious belief in his own omnipotence, was that his adventure was shortly to come to an end. Although it was true that Bertolini, the minister for colonies, had welcomed in Rome, with the greatest cordiality, the two envoys sent by the Berber leader—and had acknowledged that their requests were both reasonable and acceptable—it was also true that Governor Ragni and the head of the government, Giolitti, were absolutely opposed to any separate understanding with the Berbers. In Ragni's words,

> el-Baruni is a true megalomaniac, not a military leader.... To such a degree that he has taken for himself the title of Emir of the Jebel, announcing that he had proclaimed Musa Grada *mutasarrif* and el-Sof

> Minister of War, and issuing communiqués to that effect to the various foreign consulates.[21]

Giolitti was even more strongly opposed to the idea of opening talks with el-Baruni. To Minister Bertolini, who insisted on trying to cut a deal with the Berbers for the creation of a special administrative province with elected leaders, Giolitti replied with a harsh letter ruling out once and for all any autonomous entities. And it is worth pointing out that he sent that letter to Bertolini on March 23, 1913, immediately after giving General Ragni the order to attack the positions of the Berber chieftain. The letter said, among other things, "I believe it is advisable to undertake decisive actions against el-Baruni, the only way that we will persuade that delusional individual that it is highly unlikely that he will found a independent domain for himself."[22]

On March 23, Easter Sunday, the 7,000 men under General Lequio's command set out at 6:00 in the morning from the positions of Tebedut and made for the basin of Asabaa, where the bulk of Suleiman el-Baruni's forces were concentrated. The Arab-Berbers put up a good defense and at 8:30 launched a counterattack in an attempt to envelop the left flank of the Italian formation. The attack, however, was easily driven back by the Eritrean ascars and by the Special Brigade. At 11:15 p.m., in order to prevent their complete encirclement, the Arab-Berber forces retreated toward Gasr Yafran. They left 257 dead on the battlefield. The Italians, in contrast, had suffered casualties of 36 dead and 205 wounded.

According to Mohamed Fekini, el-Baruni played no role in the battle of Asabaa-Rabta, which was instead commanded, on the Libyan side, by a true warrior—Mohammed Ben Abdalla—the man who would defend, a few months later, the Fezzan region from the attacks of the Miani column. According to Fekini's account, which is supported by the content of a letter sent to the Italian General Lequio by none other than Suleiman el-Baruni,[23] the Berber chieftain did nothing to defend his own short-lived domain, instead fled to Nalut, and subsequently took refuge in Tunisia with his family and part of the assets left behind by the Turks. It is with profound contempt that Mohamed Fekini narrates the last actions of his great rival.

> He also asked the inhabitants of Nalut to assemble four hundred camels to transport the goods that the Turks left behind, explaining to them that he would distribute them to the children of the martyrs. Instead, Fekini states, he simply sold them the minute he reached Tunisia.[24]

4. Having routed the Arab-Berber forces at Asabaa, in the days that followed, General Lequio resumed his advance into the Jebel: an advance that met with widespread but relatively weak resistance. On March 25, he occupied Kicla; on March 27, Gasr Yafran; on April 6, Fassatu; on April 10, Josh; on April 12, Nalut; and on April 27, the distant oasis of Ghadames. The tiny alpine state of Suleiman el-Baruni had therefore lasted no longer than five months.

Once Governor Ragni completed his occupation of the Jebel, from Tarhuna to Nalut, and annexed without the slightest opposition the oases of Sinauen and Ghadames, he began to work on his plans for occupying Fezzan as well, in order to expand out to the natural frontiers of Libya before the French could lay any territorial claims to the outlying edges of the colony. Another reason for occupying Fezzan, Ragni stated in his reports to the ministry for colonies, was the necessity of preventing the Grand Senussi,[25] who was extremely active in Cyrenaica, and the remaining rebel forces in Tripolitania, from choosing Fezzan as a formidable base from which to resume offensive operations against territories already occupied by Italy.

The task of occupying Fezzan was entrusted by Minister Bertolini to Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Miani of the general staff, who had already distinguished himself in Eritrea as an outstanding commander of native troops.[26] On August 9, 1913, the expeditionary force under Miani's command left Sirte, a town on the Mediterranean coast, and marched inland into the desert, with the oasis of Sokna as their first objects, and Murzuq and Ghat as final destinations. The column consisted of 1,100 soldiers (108 Italians; the rest were Eritreans and Libyans); 10 cannons; 4 heavy machine guns; 4 trucks; and 1,756 camels loaded with water, provisions, and ammunition. Even though the ministry for colonies described it as "formidable," it was, in reality, a paltry force, and it is impossible to disagree with General Luigi Cadorna when he writes, in one of his books, that the expedition to Fezzan "was one of the most reckless and untimely attempts in the colonial history of any country on earth."[27]

In fact, alongside the 2,000 or 3,000 combatants under Mohammed Ben Abdalla's command, determined to fight with any means possible against Miani on his march into Fezzan, the column was faced by many other obstacles, including the harsh mountains of Jebel es-Soda, the vast *serir* of Ben Afien, which was devoid of wells and absolutely arid. Even before firing a single rifle shot, Miani was obliged to build 50 kilometers (30 miles) of roads for his trucks through the

lava rocks of the Black Mountain. And though he succeeded in defeating his adversaries in three pitched battles at esc-Scebb, Eschida, and Maharuga—and managed to kill on the field of battle, in the last of those three fights—Mohammed Ben Abdalla, himself ,with 600 of his men, Miani soon found himself in the impossible situation of attempting to control an area the size of Italy, with just over 1,000 men, at vast distances from his supply bases.

After unsuccessfully asking Tripoli and Rome for reinforcements, in December 1914, Colonel Miani was forced to withdraw from Fezzan and hastily retreat toward the coast, abandoning along the way "bloody shreds of our national dignity, rifles, cannons, various materiel, and millions of cartridges."[28] The outbreak of World War One inflicted the final and decisive blow upon the fragile structures of the Italian presence in Tripolitania. Though Italy stayed out of the war until May 1915, Turkey and the Central Empires already considered it to be a belligerent nation and therefore did everything possible to foment the revolt in Libya, landing by submarine on the coasts of the Sirte region German, Austrian, and Turkish officers and soldiers, as well as weapons, ammunition, and radio equipment. The Arab revolt, thanks to these contributing efforts, was thus on the brink of exploding from one moment to the next.

5. During the two years of relative peace, 1913 and 1914, while only isolated and sporadic fighting was going on in distant Fezzan, Mohamed Fekini laid down his rifle and devoted himself entirely to his work as an administrator, with the same commitment and wisdom that he had shown in his 30 years in the service of the Ottoman Empire. Appointed by Ragni as governor of Fassatu and the entire western Jebel, he immediately set to work, in turn, appointing *kaymakams* and *muftis* for every district and canton, and alongside them were appointed Italian functionaries. He boasted a solid reputation, not merely because of his long past history but also because of the loyalty he had shown to the Italian authorities, and so he won permission from Tripoli to govern according to Muslim shari'a law and to choose both Arab and Berber functionaries. He had also won amnesty for his friend Mohammed Ben Abdalla and special treatment for his family. But, as we have seen, the chief of the Ulad Bu Sef had already been killed in the battle of Maharuga.

In the summer of 1914, coinciding with the outbreak of World War One, the situation in Tripolitania changed radically, especially

through the efforts of the Sanusiya, which took advantage of its intricate and far-flung network—extending over all the regions of Libya—to intensify its activity in the mobilization and radicalizing of the Libyan people. As early as late July, the symptoms of the coming Arab revolt could be seen everywhere. On July 23, at Ziden, in the Sirte region, a caravan of 500 hundred camels was completely plundered by the Beduin insurgents, and the Senussi Saleh el-Ateusc had the daring to assault the Italian garrison of en-Nofilia. On August 26, a caravan bringing supplies to Fezzan was intercepted at the wells of Bir el-Fotia; the escort was massacred. But the most serious events took place in November in Fezzan when the Sanusiya representative, Mohamed Mahdi es-Sunni, ordered his lieutenants to attack the Italian garrisons of Sebha and Ubari, destroying them entirely and forcing Colonel Miani, as we have seen, to abandon Fezzan entirely.

Mohamed Fekini, too, mentions in his memoirs the frequent raids carried out by Senussi detachments around Ghadames but points out that the towns that were under his control "were spared, because his sympathy for the Sanusiya and its leaders was well known."[29] When he was asked by the government in Tripoli to assemble military units to oppose the attacks of the well-known Senussi chiefs Ahmed es-Sunni and Ahmed el-Badawi, Fekini replied that he could do more than to offer advice and that he refused to help foment fratricidal wars.

Sensing from all these various signals that the great Arab revolt was on the verge of exploding, Mohamed Fekini realized clearly that his position was beginning to be an awkward one and that soon he would be obliged to make a clear choice of alliance. It wasn't hard to guess which side he'd be on. Ahmed esh-Sherif, supreme leader of the Senussi brotherhood, had no doubts about which side Fekini would be on. In fact, on December 6, 1914, he sent Fekini a letter stating, among other things,

> We are currently in Sollum…but we plan to travel to Tripolitania to meet with the western tribes and encourage them to defend their homeland, support their religion, and organize combatants. With this purpose in mind we have sent you the heroic *bimbashi* Sof Bey and his comrades, who will precede us, in order to exhort the natives to awaken from their slumbers and devote themselves to the holy war. If Allah is willing, we will follow them shortly thereafter.[30]

Mohamed Fekini was certainly honored to be one of the chiefs of Tripolitania who had been directly informed of the imminent arrival in Libya of the Grand Senussi. He was, however, disturbed at the fact that alongside Ahmed esh-Sherif, at Sollum, there was also Suleiman el-Baruni—his long-time and relentless rival—once again determined to play a role of first importance.

5

The Great Arab Revolt

1. Although it is clear that the outbreak of the first World War, with the return of the Turks to Libya, contributed to the "great Arab revolt," it is equally clear that this explosion of violence was also the product of other contributing factors, foremost among them the acts of brutality, the widely detested laws, the numerous deportations, and the relentless use of the gallows that characterized the rule of the Italian authorities, both in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

The Socialist Filippo Turati spoke out in condemnation of the gallows as a tool of repression during the session of the Italian parliament of December 18, 1913.

> I heard the words of the King, just a few days ago, to the effect that the acquisition of Libya gives Italy a great civilizing mission, and that our foremost objective is to make those peoples our friends, by respecting their religion, property, and families, and by imparting to them the advantages of civilization. Instead, what I see is an all-encompassing shadow of the gallows extending over your endeavor!... Every soldier who performs the noble task of executioner receives, through the office of the Carabinieri, a special bonus of five francs.... I ask myself, is this really Italy, is the government aware that someone named Cesare Beccaria was born in Italy?[1]

But the ordeal of the Libyans was not limited to the issuance of hundreds and hundreds of death sentences, executed either with the gallows or with firing squads. The other terrible arm of occupation law involved deportation to Italian penitentiaries, located, for the most part, on disease-ridden islands. Ponza and Ustica were thronged with Libyan prisoners. In March 1916, on Ustica alone, there were 1,360 Arab prisoners. Some spent just a few months in

Italian prisons, others remained there for years, and a great many died there. Others fell gravely ill and, in some cases, were simply sent home to die in Libya. Those who managed to survive the hardships, shortages, and diseases, pined away thinking of their distant homes and the families that, in most cases, had been left without a provider. The archives of the ministry for colonies are full of begging letters, requests for pardons, complaints, and protests from the various islands of deportation.[2]

Among the factors that triggered general insurrection among the Arabs in 1914–1915, the family members of those hanged, executed by firing squad, and sentenced to political exile certainly played a role. As Colonel Arturo Vacca Maggiolini wrote, however, far older abuses and errors also played a role in triggering the revolt.

> If the revolt thus found fertile soil and so rapidly sank its roots throughout the colony, one of the reasons is that since 1911 we had done so very little to win ourselves the love and respect of the natives and to join them to our side by close ties of interest. Most importantly, we committed a grave moral and political error: we made solemn promises to the Arabs, first on the very day of our initial landings, and later in the form of repeated reiterations: promises that we never maintained.... Upon this terrain already steeped in suspicions and rancors, Germans and Turks worked to great effect throughout the European war, conducting an active and skillful campaign which destroyed the last shreds of Italian prestige and fanned the flames of the most ferocious hatred, the blindest fanaticism, against us. We became for the Arabs of Tripolitania the most despicable creatures in all creation, and it became a just and meritorious action to exterminate us and expel us from the sacred soil of Islam.[3]

2. We have considered the causes of the great Arab revolt. Now let us examine who worked to guide it. From the documents in Italian archives and from the memoirs of Mohamed Fekini, it is evident that in the first phase of the great rebellion, the entire leadership of Sanusiya collectively fanned the flames of revolution. In Cyrenaica, Ahmed esh-Sherif was especially active. In the Sirte region, his brother Mohammed Safi ed-Din was at work. Another brother of Ahmed esh-Sherif, Mohammed el-Abed, controlled the Fezzan area, along with his lieutenant Mohamed Mahdi es-Sunni. The Senussi brotherhood felt so powerful that, at one point, it was fighting simultaneously against the Italians, the English, and

the French, respectively, in Libya, Egypt, and in the Ouaddaï and Borkou.

At the end of 1914, the Italians were faced with a situation that, while not yet fully catastrophic, was still certainly unsettling and painful. The Fezzan was completely lost. Ghibla, as well, following the withdrawal of the garrison of el-Gheriat at Mizda, could fairly be considered lost territory. The Sirte region remained Italian in name only (and that for only a short time to come). Last of all, Jebel Nefusa was at the mercy of the Berber chieftain Khalifa ben Askar, who had once been in the service of the Italians but had since passed over to the opposition following a brutal insult received from an Italian officer.[4] In short, the governor of Tripolitania, Luigi Druetti, maintained solid control over the boundary line of the Jebel, between Khoms and Fassatu, with the few garrisons outside Nalut, Mizda, and Beni Ulid.

The collapse of all Italian resistance came in April 1915, when Colonel Gianinazzi was defeated twice by the *mujahideen* led by Ahmed es-Sunni at Chormet el-Chaddamia and at Wadi Marsit. Three weeks later, on April 29, it was Antonio Miani's turn to be routed at Gasr bu Hadi, in the Sirte region. The battle that in present-day Libya is commemorated as the battle of Qardabiya, was commanded and won by Mohammed Safi ed-Din and Ahmed Tuati. The Italians suffered huge casualties in the fighting and subsequent retreat to the entrenched camp of Sirte, greater than in any other battle in Libya since 1911. Out of 84 officers, 19 were killed, and 23 were wounded. Out of 900 Italian soldiers, there were 237 dead and 127 wounded. Of the 2,175 Eritrean and Libyan ascars, 242 were killed, and 290 were wounded. Not only were there close to a thousand casualties, compounding the disaster was the fact that, as Raffaele Ciasca notes, there fell into enemy hands "the entire stock of 5,000 spare rifles, several million cartridges, machine guns, six artillery groups, an entire convoy of supplies, the expedition's provisions, and even the military treasury."[5] An arsenal of monumental proportions, which would be helpful in establishing new *mehallas* and rendering the Arab revolt more extensive and aggressive.

In early May 1915, the revolt had spread over nearly the entire territory of the Tripoli region still held by the Italians. Fierce fighting was still raging around Misratah, Zliten, and Tauorga. Further south, in the Orfella region, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, who had served as a consultant to Colonel Miani during the campaign that resulted in the conquest of Fezzan, openly went over to the rebel side and, with a thousand men of his own, attacked the garrison of Beni Ulid and

laid siege to it. Tarhuna suffered the same fate: here, the siege was commanded by Saadi ben Sultan, whose brother had been executed by firing squad at Miani's orders on May 2 in Sirte, in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of Gasr bu Hadi. All efforts to get aid to the besieged Italians proved fruitless. The attempts to break the encirclement were disastrous.

In a letter to the minister for colonies, Ferdinando Martini, the Italian prime minister, Antonio Salandra, wrote that "the material and moral losses are equal, or nearly equal, to those of Adwa."[6] In reality, they were greater. General Latini estimated losses of 5,031 men. One witness to the events, Vincenzo Giovanni De Meo, stated that "the tragedy took the material form of 5,600 dead, several thousand wounded, and about 2,000 prisoners."[7] In the words of Meuccio Ruini, a future minister for colonies, "the retreat left 10,000 dead on the sands of the colonial desert."[8] The statistics on the loss of materiel were also catastrophic. The Arabs had in fact captured 37 cannons, 20 machine guns, 9,048 rifles, 28,021 cannon shells, 6,185,000 cartridges for rifles and machine guns, 37 trucks, and 14 broadcasting and receiving stations.

In the face of the rapidly spreading Arab revolt, further reinforced by the weapons captured, the Italian government ordered the withdrawal of all inland garrisons. Between June 15 and July 8, all the garrisons of the Jebel were withdrawn. Therefore, all of the Gefara, the plain that extended beyond Tripoli, was also abandoned. Between July 6 and 17, the garrisons of Funduq Ben Ghashir, Suani Ben Adem, el-Azizia, Zavia, and Zanzur retreated to the capital, assailed by continuous attacks from the *mujahideen*. At the end of July, General Ameglio, immediately after taking office as governor of what remained of Tripolitania, also ordered the withdrawal of the garrisons of Zuara and Misratah Marina. All that remained under Italian control, therefore, was Tripoli and Khoms, exactly the same as in long-ago 1911, at the time of the initial Italian landings.

3. As these events were unfolding and Tripolitania was changing hands, Mohamed Fekini found himself in the unusual position of being courted both by the Senussi and by the Italians. He reports in his memoirs,

> During this period, the Senussi leaders sought the cooperation of Hajj Fekini, governor of the Jebel. The Italians too asked for his help in protecting the retreat of their soldiers toward Tripoli. They had promised

to give him the property that remained in the government palace of Fassatu. Following their departure, however, the local inhabitants rushed into the building and plundered every corner of it.[9]

A few months later, on December 4, 1915, Mohamed Fekini received a long letter from Mohammed Safi ed-Din, who wrote, among other things,

> We herewith inform you that the troops of the brigant Ramadan al-Shitawi and Abd en-Nebi Belcher (enemy of the Prophet), accompanied by a band of rejects from the community of Misratah, attempted to bar our way…but we successfully beat them and put them to flight. Currently, we are occupying, together with our confederates, an excellent position, in the castle of Beni Ulid, in the Orfella region. All the same, we are in need of munitions and provisions. We rely upon your diligence and we ask you to send us at the earliest possible time the items we have requested in substantial quantity. Considering that the brigands have fled toward Misratah, we intend to chase them down and inflict punishment.[10]

The request for aid, and subsequently a request for mediation with his adversaries in Misratah that Mohammed Safi ed-Din sent to Fekini, showed that the Senussi brotherhood, as powerful and widespread as it might have been throughout the country, had not won the unalloyed support of one and all. Examining the vast Senussi plan of action, the governor of Tripolitania, General Giovanni Ameglio, wrote, in a report he issued on December 23 1915, that

> it is clearly the integrating element that brings together all those hostile to our presence, the most energetic and determined of all our adversaries and of all friendly powers in northern Africa. Without the Senussi's role in bringing together and inciting our enemies, it would be fair to say that the efforts at political division pursued by this government would certainly by now have achieved much greater results than is the actual case.[11]

And yet, Ameglio continued, working from plentiful and accurate intelligence gathered from the enemy camp, the Senussi had not attained all their objectives in Tripolitania. Indeed, they had met as well with more than one serious setback. For instance, at the conference of the Libyan leaders held in early October in Tarhuna, no administrative statutes had been set forth for Tripolitania, for the

simple reason that the majority of the notables had refused to acknowledge Safi ed-Din as the representative of a government with sufficient resources to challenge successfully the Italian government. A number of chiefs, among them Ramadan al-Shitawi and Abd en-Nebi Belcher, had expressed open hostility to Safi ed-Din. Ramadan al-Shitawi, Ameglio noted, made no secret that he was working in favor of the outright restoration of the Ottoman administration.

> Ambitious, energetic, and unscrupulous, he, more than any of the other chiefs has displayed considerable energy and prestige, along with independent aspirations...In all likelihood, Ramadan al-Shitawi's pro-Turkish stance, in his disagreement with Safi ed-Din..., represents nothing more than the popular banner of the moment, in an effort either to overthrow the Senussi in Tripolitania, or to gain recognition from them, as an independent chieftain, and to exploit the wealthy region of Misratah and Zliten.[12]

To further complicate matters and heighten the level or conflict, in a proliferation of factions and hatred, the brothers of the Grand Senussi Ahmed esh-Sherif also contributed to the tension. As Mohamed Fekini informs us, at the end of December 1915, Ahmed es-Sunni, who lived temporarily in the western Jebel, received a letter from Mohammed el-Abed, which announced that el-Abed had taken the title of Sultan of Tripoli and conferred upon es-Sunni the office of governor of that city. In the same letter, Mohammed el-Abed stated that he had ordered his brother Safi ed-Din to leave Tripolitania immediately and to return to Cyrenaica.

Ahmed es-Sunni immediately summoned together all the chieftains of the Jebel el-Garbia to inform them of the contents of the letter. During that meeting, Mohamed Fekini urged him to keep the letter secret to prevent new conflicts and further divisions. Ahmed es-Sunni, however, ignored his advice and began to act as governor of the region, handing out offices and establishing alliances, and indeed, provoking, as Mohamed Fekini had sagely predicted, new waves of hostility.[13]

At this point, the situation in Libya had become so complex, contradictory, and confused that Fekini himself was obliged to recapitulate events in order to form a clear idea of what was happening. Here is his summary:

- The Italians were still besieged in a few coastal towns in the *vilayet*.
- Nalut was under the control of the Berber chieftain Khalifa ben Askar.

- Ahmed es-Sunni and Mohammed el-Abed were certain that they controlled Fassatu, but they were mistaken.
- The tribes of the Zintan and the Rojeban had joined with Fekini against Ahmed es-Sunni.
- Gasr Yafran was under the rule of Sassi Khazam, who swore that he was an ally of the Sanusiya, but in reality, he was secretly collaborating with the Italians in Zuara.
- Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi was fighting against Sultan ben Shaban, *kaymakam* of Zuara, who enjoyed the support of Italian warships.
- Safi ed-Din continued to oppose Ramadan al-Shitawi and Abd en-Nebi Belcher, but he was unable to pry them out of Misratah.[14]

Governor Ameglio was certainly aware of this complex and absurd situation and was undoubtedly gleefully, observing the factional divisions among his adversaries and delighting in the "efforts at political division" that he had achieved with respect to the Arabo-Senussi front. Even though General Ameglio still commanded, in Tripoli and Khoms, 33,664 soldiers, 133 cannons—both mobile and fixed—28 heavy machine guns, and 9 airplanes (both Farmans and Capronis), he knew perfectly well that if the Arabs ever stopped quarreling and concentrated all their forces (including the 37 cannons captured from the Italians) against the defenses of Tripoli, that city could not long resist them.

Confident, however, that the Arabs would not soon come to a general agreement and that he still had plenty of room for maneuver in his "efforts at political division" among his enemies, in the summer of 1916, General Ameglio announced, in a sign of his unaltered determination to prevail, sizable rewards for the capture of the top leaders of the revolt, to be paid "to anyone who contributed to their capture or death." The 20,000 lire rewards were levied on the heads of Ramadan al-Shitawi and Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi. The 10,000 lire rewards were assigned to Mohamed Fekini and Suleiman el-Baruni.[15] Fekini, who had actually worked more actively in the previous period as a peacemaker than a rebel, was thus entered onto the blacklist of implacable enemies of the Italian occupation. And he was never to leave that list.

4. The first illustrious victim of the new outburst of conflicts among the Arab chieftains was Mohammed Safi ed-Din. Following the October conference in Tarhuna, where he had been outnumbered, none of the notables present had come to his aid, not even those who claimed to govern their domains in the name of the "Sanusiya Elect."

According to Ameglio's view of matters, the very young Safi ed-Din (who was not yet 20) had committed a number of political errors, especially by selling out the ideological content of his pan-Islamic and pan-Arabic program, immediately replacing those ideals with excessively personal methods of governance, with a clear focus on material gain.

Well aware that he could no longer count on the support of his brother Mohammed el-Abed, who had, in fact, ordered him to leave Tripolitania—and by now certain that he had lost the battle with Ramadan al-Shitawi and that his own life might well be in imminent danger—on January 7, 1916, just six months after his triumphal entrance into the Turkish castle of Beni Ulid, Safi ed-Din secretly fled the citadel with a few faithful followers and quickly made his way toward the Sirte region, where he could count on the support of the intensely loyal Saleh el-Ateusc. But his lieutenant, Ahmed Tuati, failed to make it to safety.

"Stripped of his silk clothing and his turban bedecked with gold and silver embroidery, dressed only in a simple shirt," wrote Lieutenant Ettore Miraglia, an eyewitness,[16] "he walked forward, taking tiny steps, hobbled as he was by a heavy iron chain attached to both ankles.... Tuati was questioned directly by Ramadan al-Shitawi and, following the painful interrogation, he was lowered into the castle's cistern, where both hands were bound behind his back so that he was unable even to eat with the dignity of a man, but was instead obliged to lower his mouth to his food, his face grazing the ground, like a dog."[17]

Mohammed Safi ed-Din's precipitous flight from Beni Ulid and the tragic fate of his lieutenant, Ahmed Tuati, concluded the short Senussi protectorate over Tripolitania. From that day forward, the influence of the brotherhood extended no further than Wadi Zemzem, in the Sirte region. In place of the Senussi at the head of the anti-Italian revolt were a numerous group of Turkish officers, who arrived in Misratah at the end of 1915.

At first, Turkey seemed determined simply to support all and any Arab forces willing to fight against Italy, delegating command over all military operations to them. But at the beginning of 1916, the Turks had a drastic change of attitude and attempted to regain complete control over the struggle, even at the cost of entirely abandoning the Sanusiya, even though it had faithfully served the Sublime Porte. As a first move, Turkey informed the Italian government,

through neutral Spain, that

> in consideration of the fact that the state of war had annulled all treaties and conventions with Italy, the Treaty of Ouchy had also become null and void, and therefore Turkey intended to exercise its rights of sovereignty over the *vilayet* of Tripoli and the *liwa* of Benghazi. Turkey therefore was no longer bound by its commitment to refrain from sending weapons and ammunition, soldiers and officers to the territories in question.[18]

In the course of the following few months, Misratah rapidly became the leading political and military capital of the revolt and was linked to Constantinople by a powerful radio broadcasting and receiving station. "Submarines began arriving every fifteen days, with stunning punctuality," reported Lieutenant Miraglia, still a prisoner of Ramadan al-Shitawi in Misratah. "The Turkish officers who emerged from each submarine were sent by Nuri[19] to all the various towns, invariably to carry out unadulterated military organization, while weapons were forwarded in all directions."[20] According to intelligence gathered by Governor Ameglio, the Turkish submarines landed with each trip hundreds of rifles, ammunition, cash, and even small 37mm and 57mm cannons. All this, Ameglio reported to the ministry for colonies, caused a "substantial deterioration of the situation in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica."[21]

5. In order to deflect the new political and military offensive of the Arabo-Turks, Governor Ameglio intensified his efforts to sow dissension among the *mujahideen*, urging the Berbers to distrust the Arabs and pitting the Arabs against the Senussi. He obtained an initial success with two of the Berber chieftains, Sassi Khazam and Yusuf Cherbisc, who refused to acknowledge the authority of the Sanusiya and displayed particular hostility toward a number of its representatives, such as Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi, Mahdi es-Sunni, and Mohamed Fekini.[22] What was passed off by Italian colonial historians as an ethnic clash between Arabs and Berbers was, in reality, a masterpiece of perfidy on the part of General Ameglio. Through the *mutasarrif* of Zuara, Sultan ben Shaban, an Ibadite who had already performed a variety of services for the government of Tripoli, he contacted Sassi Khazam and Yusuf Cherbisc and promised them weapons, ammunitions, provisions, and money, as well as

the support of Italian troops, if they agreed to open an anti-Arab front in the Jebel.

The two Berber chiefs did not require much persuasion and immediately accepted the proposals of Governor Ameglio. Sassi Khazam governed, on behalf of the Sanusiya, the important Ibadite-majority town of Gasr Yafran. Yusuf Cherbisc, in turn, controlled with his forces the town of Fassatu. The history of this remarkable individual bears recounting because it casts a new light on the supposed age-old hatred between Arabs and Berbers. When Yusuf Cherbisc's father died, he found himself in serious financial difficulties, and was even arrested by the Ottoman authorities for failing to pay his taxes. Mohamed Fekini came to his aid and not only paid, out of his own pocket, the taxes owed by the young Berber, he even offered him a job. Fekini noticed that Cherbisc possessed a sound education in the field of administration, so he entrusted him with running the township of Fassatu. Yusuf Cherbisc, then, had a substantial debt of gratitude toward Mohamed Fekini, who had taken him into his home and treated him like his own son; perhaps it was for that reason that he did not conceal from Fekini his decision to switch sides. Fekini recalls, "One night he came to see me and said: 'These Senussi are not so wonderful. It is better to work for the Italian government.' "[23]

Soon, Mohamed Fekini was informed that both Sassi Khazam and Yusuf Cherbisc had begun fighting the Arab communities of the Jebel, according to the scheme hatched by Governor Ameglio. On April 28, 1916, he received a letter from Said Abu Barnousa, who asked him to intervene urgently because "the accursed Cherbisc has threatened to burn my house and to kill my children and servants."[24] Sometime later, a group of 11 notables from the western Jebel announced to him that Sassi Khazam was doing as he saw fit in the area—raiding, looting, and committing acts of violence and had recently received from Zuara, now reoccupied by the Italians, on May 18, a caravan of supplies, including foodstuffs, ammunition, and other goods. The letter ended with this plea: "All our tribes await your advice and your decision."[25]

Mohamed Fekini was receiving too many appeals for help and calls for assistance from every corner of the Jebel to be able, as the region's leading authority, to continue to ignore the serious events being reported. Before taking action, however, Fekini summoned the *ulama* and, encouraged by their decision to issue a *fatwa* against the two Berber chieftains, ordered them to cease hostilities and to

cut their ties with the Italian and Ibadite authorities of Zuara. Once he received a clear refusal to do so, he initiated hostilities against Fassatu, mobilizing the greatest possible number of fighters and moving into position as well a heavy large-caliber cannon, drawn by four camels.[26]

The fighting went on for seven days. Then Fassatu fell to Mohamed Fekini and his allies, while Yusuf Cherbisc managed to flee and take refuge in Zuara with the survivors of his group. Fekini immediately continued his offensive, moving to Gasr Yafran where he laid siege to the place. This was the end, according to Sassi Khazam. In a letter he wrote to the *mutasarrif* of Zuara, but which was intercepted, the Berber chieftain wrote, among other things,

> We are now completely surrounded by enemies and all ways out are cut off…Dear brother, let me know if you intend to help us and, if not, tell me the truth so that I may seek another solution, another way out of this dilemma, before Gasr Yafran suffers the same fate as Fassatu.[27]

In truth, General Ameglio had given orders to send aid to Sassi Khazam, but the supply column, under the command of Captain Streva, could not break through to the Jebel and was forced to retreat hastily to Zuara. At the same time, the followers of Mohamed Fekini attacked Gasr Yafran and, on October 20, 1916, took the place. Sassi Khazam was captured and subjected to trial by the *ulama*; he was sentenced to death and entrusted to Mahdi es-Sunni for execution. Mahdi es-Sunni had him executed by firing squad in the town of Kakla. Ameglio's ambiguous machinations to pit the Berbers of the Jebel against the Arabs not only ended in a complete military fiasco, but the blood that had been so needlessly shed alienated many Arabs from their pro-Italian sympathies—beginning with the Koobar brothers, who had performed invaluable services for the government in Tripoli but who now shifted their loyalties, as well as their men—to the rebel side.[28]

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6

The Birth of the Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya

1. Even though the attempts to involve the Berbers and stimulate their aspirations to self-government had failed completely, General Ameglio nonetheless had derived a considerable advantage: on May 18, 1916, he reoccupied the port and the city of Zuara, without which he would never have been able to supply aid to the Berbers of the Jebel. The landing in Zuara had a two-fold significance, both military and moral, because it shifted direction on the continuous loss of territory. From Zuara, last of all, General Latini was able to scatter in August the rebel *mehallas* that had nested in the neighboring oases of Al Ajaylat and Sorman.

In the fall of 1916, the Arab resistance movement, which seemed to have slipped into a phase of lethargy, suddenly received an unexpected burst of enthusiasm from the efforts of the very young division-rank general Nuri Pasha and the unsinkable Suleiman el-Baruni. El-Baruni, who had been written off repeatedly and whose reputation was that of an ambiguous and untrustworthy operator, had returned victorious to Tripolitania after receiving, from the hands of Sultan Mehmed V, a firman appointing him as governor and military commander of Tripolitania. Setting to one side, for the moment, his dream of a Berber state, Senator Suleiman el-Baruni returned to Libya as the sultan's *vali*, with broad powers and the assignment to foment revolt in Tunisia and Algeria as well.

Arriving at Misratah Marina aboard a Turkish submarine, probably at the end of October 1916, Suleiman el-Baruni immediately worked very actively to reconcile the tensions and rivalries that were so undermining the Libyan front, distributing positions and accepting Mohamed Fekini's advice against attacking Tunisia. It was from Tunisia, it should be remembered, that the Libyans had received most

of the aid sent to the country during the Italo-Turkish war.[1] Forgetting (or pretending to forget) the harsh disagreements that had separated him from Fekini in the past, he lavished compliments and praise upon him, as can be seen in the letter dated December 24, 1916, in which he announced his intention to lay siege to Zuara: "To the patriot and true warrior, our brother Hajj Mohamed Bey Fekini, may God crown his efforts with success. I have received your letter. I am pleased with your work. The blessings of Allah upon you, you are truly equal to the hopes of our religion and our nation."[2]

On the same day, December 24, Suleiman el-Baruni sent a second letter to Fekini with this singular request:

> But the most important thing, now, is how quickly you can act. You must send us the cannon accessories so that they can be used for the cannon of el-Azizia, since both cannons are the same make and the same caliber. Also send us a sufficient quantity of projectiles for these cannons, because we intend to besiege the city and bombard it from all sides.[3]

Four days later, Suleiman informed Fekini that he had arrived with the entire army at Al Ajaylat and that the next day he would take up a position before Zuara. Therefore, he urged Fekini to join them, which Mohamed Fekini did as quickly as possible, along with several hundred Rojeban and Zintan horsemen.

In the days that followed, Suleiman, Fekini, and a group of Turkish and German officers met in the oasis of el-Gedida to evaluate the situation. At the end of the meeting, it was decided that the *mujahideen* army would attack Zuara from the south. During the night, however, an entirely unprecedented event occurred that threatened to compromise the entire operation. The Turkish intelligence services managed to discover that a number of Ibadite spies from Zuara had met with Suleiman el-Baruni. They were arrested, and on the person of one of those spies was found a message from el-Baruni for the chief of the Berber bands, Yusuf Cherbisc, with all the details of the imminent attack.[4]

Despite the grave mishap, the attack was not postponed. But General Ameglio, in the meanwhile, had taken appropriate measures, embarking 5,700 infantry, 200 horsemen, and 14 artillery pieces and concentrating them at Zuara. On the night of January 15, 1917, General Latini marched out of the city and began his offensive with a two-fold objective: to restore communications between Zuara and

Tripoli and to scatter the *mehallas* that were concentrated in the oases of el-Gedida and Al Ajaylat. But what General Latini did not know was the number of rebels opposing him—more than 5,000—or that at their command were many of the most respected leaders of the revolt, from Suleiman el-Baruni and Mohamed Fekini, to Mahdi es-Sunni and Khalifa ben Askar.

Fighting began at dawn on January 16, to the west of el-Gedida, amid sand storms that paralyzed all scouting and limited the range of the artillery. Nonetheless, the clashes were harsh, and fighting continued until evening, with the outcome of the battle uncertain. The following day, General Latini was unsuccessful in his attempt to take the oasis of el-Gedida, and that evening he was forced to retreat to Zuara, chased by *mujahideen* who dogged his withdrawal all the way to the port. Among the Arab combatants was also one of Mohamed Fekini's sons, the very young Hussein, barely 13.[5]

Although they were victorious in this early phase of the fighting, the *mujahideen* were nonetheless forced to abandon Zuara and retreat to the oasis of Bou Ajila under a hail of airborne bombing and artillery bombardment from the ships standing offshore. Still, General Latini had failed to achieve either of his objectives and had suffered heavy losses: 76 dead, 235 wounded.[6] What had been intended as a show of force, then, had actually failed to attain any concrete results whatsoever, because there had been no subsequent occupation of territory. Moreover, Latini had run the risk of losing Zuara entirely, which would have forced him to evacuate hastily his entire expeditionary force.

2. In the memoirs of Mohamed Fekini, the secret meeting between Suleiman el-Baruni and the envoys of Yusuf Cherbisc is discussed briefly in ten lines of text and, most surprising of all, without the slightest comment. Knowing Fekini's age-old animosity toward his Berber rival, his silence concerning this especially serious episode is puzzling. Either it was a frame-up, devised by the Ottoman espionage service to discredit Suleiman, and in that case, one wonders why Fekini would have included it, however briefly, in his memoirs; or, alternatively, the meeting actually took place and Fekini, while waiting for the representative of the Sultan, Nuri Pasha, to take measures, had decided to reserve judgment. This episode, in any case, smacked of the improbable. The commander in chief of an army had, through certain intermediaries, revealed to his enemy his own positions and his own plan just before attacking that enemy. What twisting and

turning paths had the unsinkable and untrustworthy Suleiman el-Baruni chosen to follow?

What we do know, as confirmed by official Italian and Turkish documents, is that nothing happened to him, and he continued to hold his high offices. Ten days after the battles of el-Gedida and Zuara, Mohamed Fekini received this sensational announcement in a letter that bore the joint signatures of Nuri Pasha and Suleiman el-Baruni:

> We have decided to appoint you inspector general for the western sector of the *vilayet* because we are familiar with your loyalty to the Ottoman state, your love of country, your competence, and your profound understanding of the nation and the ways of the populace. We ask you to travel to Zavia, Zanzur, Tarhuna, el-Azizia, Garian, and the Jebel. Advise the people to remain united and at one so that they may serve their homeland. At the end of your inspection, you will provide us with a report on everything that you have learned concerning public opinion and anything else that may prove useful to the nation.[7]

In military terms, as well, Suleiman el-Baruni continued to command at the highest levels, as shown by this letter sent to Fekini on February 24, 1917:

> We have decided to attack the city (this time, referring to Tripoli) with the cannons that have previously proven to be so powerful and effective. We have ordered that the cannon of Zavia be sent to Suani Ben Adem. It is also necessary that you send to us the two cannons of Garian at the earliest possible time, if possible, within seven days.[8]

In effect, the siege being laid by the *mujahideen* upon the three cities still under Italian control continued inexorably, despite the sorties and various attempts to expand the salients.

On April 5, 1917, General Cassinis exited Zuara at the head of a powerful column consisting of 5,110 regular troops, 4,259 irregulars, 550 horsemen, and 16 artillery pieces. The following day, he made contact with the enemy at el-Doranca, to the south of Al Ajaylat. The fighting lasted for five hours; then the *mujahideen* began their retreat. But Cassinis failed to occupy the positions he had taken, and after spending the night at Gasr Tellil, he withdrew the following day and returned to Zuara. Even the effort that Cassinis made in September to occupy the coastal positions of Marsa Zuaga and Sidi Bilal was

unsuccessful, as was his plan to retake el-Azizia, which had in the meanwhile become the main center for Suleiman el-Baruni's communications and propaganda. General Cassinis, in fact, was unable to occupy Funduq Ben Ghashir, midway along the road. After a five-hour engagement initiated by the rebels, who tried to outflank him on his right wing, on the afternoon of September 20, he was forced to withdraw to Tripoli.

On May 2, 1917, in the meanwhile, Mohamed Fekini had received a further assignment and a new promotion. Nuri Pasha and Suleiman el-Baruni sent him a firman from the Sultan that stated:

> Considering your good behavior in public affairs and your loyalty to the Ottoman state, we have decided to appoint you *mutasarrif* of the western Jebel region. You must reorganize public affairs there, prevent all injustice, and reestablish law and order in these regions. Render the roads and streets safe, and suppress corruption, in order that our enemies may be conquered. May Allah assist you.[9]

3. Besieged in his three strongholds of Tripoli, Khoms, and Zuara; incapable of permanently occupying any further territory; and indifferent to the pressure from the Minister for Colonies Colosimo, who demanded greater activity from a general of his reputation, Governor Ameglio took his revenge by attempting to apply on a broad scale a scorched-earth policy. In April, he ordered the Italian air force to launch 1,270 kilograms (2,800 lbs.) of incendiary liquid and 3,600 kilograms (four tons) of high explosives onto the barley fields of Zanzur and Zavia. Between May and August, he assigned all the airplanes in Tripolitania to a series of operations in the countryside of Suani Ben Adem, Zanzur, Funduq Ben Ghashir, el-Gedida, Sorman, Al Ajaylat, Zavia, and el-Azizia. By burning all the crops of Gefara, Ameglio felt sure that he could force the rebels to retreat to the Jebel, thus loosening their grip on the three coastal cities. But, even though the damage was immense and hunger was beginning to decimate the Arab populace, the rebels kept their grip on the cities as tightly as ever.

Although life was harsh in the territory under *mujahideen* control, and the survival of the populace depended largely upon the supply of caravans of provisions that arrived periodically from Tunisia, there was a steady wave of tension in Tripoli as well, even though the city was defended by a formidable ring of fortifications. The atmosphere

in the city was anything but serene. As General Gherardo Pàntano wrote,

> the most substantial defenses have little if any worth if the people behind them are none too solid. The morale of the troops was at rock-bottom: continuous failures for months, the pointlessness of the valorous deeds performed, the painful, disastrous retreat, the grave losses suffered, had all shaken their outlooks.[10]

Pàntano, who was defending the easternmost section of the oasis of Tripoli with three battalions, stated that by night, the city was completely paralyzed by panic: "A stray dog, a cat in heat, a rag tossed by the breeze, or the moving shadow of palm leaves were enough to raise alarms that culminated in foolish shooting sprees along the length of the heavily guarded lines of barbed wire."[11]

The mistrust and suspicion toward the Arabs had become so great that Ameglio was obliged to deport to Sicily even the Libyan battalions that had proven to be absolutely loyal. As honest and impartial a witness as Pàntano wrote in this connection:

> In the cafés, in the dining halls, the talk was only of hangings, firing squads, and the destruction needed to conquer Tripolitania once and for all. Evidently, they were talking about hanging, executing, and destroying Arabs who, out of love or by force, had remained enclosed with us inside our defenses. Because the others, the rebels, had already taken care to ensure that they were safe from all such summary punishments.[12]

While combat activity declined considerably, the sole true protagonist in both camps was hunger. "The troops were in an incredible state of physical depression," Pàntano writes. "Their rations had been reduced to such a degree that those unfortunate soldiers were reduced to eating all the cats and dogs in the oasis, and some went so far as to compete with the quadrupeds for the alfalfa, which they cooked, seasoning it as if it were salad. Their ration of meat shrank to 200 grams (7 ounces) per week."[13] While blame for the lack of foodstuff in the Italian camp could be attributed to the intensification of the campaign of German and Austrian submarines, which attacked the supply convoys, in the rebel camp, all responsibility for the hunger could be laid to Governor Ameglio and his demented scorched-earth policy. "Old men, women, children driven by hunger, came out of the interior to die at the base of the wire fences," wrote Colonel Ottorino

Mezzetti, commander of the zone of Zuara. "We had no possibility of taking them in, both because the population was already on rations, and because we were relying on mass starvation in the almost entirely blockaded interior of the country to push the rebels to surrender."[14]

4. While panic reigned in Tripoli and starvation hobbled Gefara, General Nuri Pasha set himself the very ambitious goal of driving the Senussi out of Fezzan as well. Thanks to the activity of the Albanian Mohammed el-Arnauti ben Khalifa Zami and other Turkish agents, he succeeded in instigating a revolt against the Senussi Brotherhood in Fezzan. In August 1917, in a battle near Sebha, Mohammed Ali el-Asceb, uncle of the Grand Senussi, was taken prisoner and then hanged. As for Mohammed el-Abed, brother of the head of the brotherhood, he was driven out of Uau el-Khebir and forced to seek shelter in the distant Kufra. This was the end of Senussi supremacy in Fezzan.

At the end of 1917, in the meanwhile, the Turkish high command had changed. Nuri Pasha had left his post after Ramadan al-Shitawi attacked one of his caravans at Sirte; that caravan was carrying arms, ammunition, foodstuffs, and cash, was escorted by 40 men and a number of Turkish officers and was intended for the *mujahideen* of Cyrenaica. Indignant at the robbery and the massacre of the escort, Nuri Pasha asked his brother Enver Pasha to summon him back to Turkey.[15] To take his place, the Sublime Porte appointed General Ishaq Pasha, who was, in turn, replaced a few months later by the son of the former sultan Murad, Emir Othman Fuad, in the role of viceroy and general commander. As soon as he arrived at Misratah by submarine, he paid visits to the Italian prisoners, as Lieutenant Miraglia recalls,

> Young and spirited, he dismounted, leaping down from his horse with great agility, and came to say hello to us with gentlemanly affability, spending a little time chatting with us.... He was dressed entirely in white, with a turban surrounded by gold and silver braidery. This prince could not help but win our intense sympathy and fondness...even though there was something of the operetta prince about him.[16]

Othman Fuad had brought with him, as his advising minister, the Egyptian Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, future secretary general of the Arab League. Together they undertook a long journey to inspect the eastern and western fronts. During the course of this journey, the Egyptian gathered a number of negative opinions concerning Suleiman el-Baruni, to the point that he reported these criticisms to his superiors and even to the central government in Constantinople.

This led to the creation of a commission of inquiry which determined, without the shadow of a doubt, the continual collusion of the Berber chieftain with the Ibadites who had taken refuge in Zuara. Since the actions thus identified constituted the crime of high treason, the commission issued a death sentence against el-Baruni. But Suleiman had decided not to wait around for the sentence. A few hours before it was publicly issued, he had already taken refuge in Tarhuna, at the home of his friend Ahmed el-Mraied, and he remained there under Ahmed el-Mraied's protection until the end of the war and the surrender of the Ottoman state.[17]

The personality of Suleiman el-Baruni, though it has been studied by a number of historians, Italian historians among them,[18] remains one of the enigmatic and obscure of the period. Just a few months after his secret meeting with the emissaries of Yusuf Cherbisc, an episode that alone would have amply justified his death sentence, Suleiman el-Baruni sent to the Ibadite chief and the other notables who had chosen to live in Zuara, beneath the protection of the Italians and in collaboration with them, the following strange letter, which seems to deny all guilt and certainly shows off his literary skills. After evoking their valor and rectitude during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–1912, Suleiman asked them a closely reasoned series of questions. Will you allow, by Allah, you who are the most intelligent persons in the region, that your country should remain a ruin, inhabited by delinquents, that the cry of the owl should resound there, when it was once a destination for visitors and abounded in generous men and wise and intrepid warriors of great repute? Will you allow those immaculate mosques, which were built in the name of Allah more than thirteen centuries ago, to remain empty and in shambles, without the name of the Lord ever being uttered in them? Are you willing to hear and see those chaste and pure virgins, with their delicate skin, as they walk, naked and barefoot, begging for alms by the side of the road, in every village and beneath every tree, while hunger has changed their shapes and sun and wind has altered their complexions? Are you willing to live in a country that belongs to others, foreigners, humiliated, insulted, and poverty-stricken, while you have abandoned a country that once was the capital of true glory?[19]

Who then was this man, Suleiman el-Baruni, who was capable of treason and at the same time exhorted his people to redeem their lost honor? He was, in all likelihood, a complete chameleon, ready to adapt to any situation, any emergency. He had been prosecuted by the Ottoman government in four different trials and ultimately sentenced

to death, but he had emerged each time from prison and from disrepute stronger and more combative than before. In a world of largely illiterate peasants, he used his learning and his eloquence, and his boundless imagination, as a powerful and often-victorious weapon. The documents from Arab sources, which we can finally consult, confirm the generally negative judgments offered on his account by the Italian occupying authorities, as we have already had an opportunity to see.

5. The war had just come to an end in Europe when at Al Qasabat, during the course of a meeting of Libyan chieftains, the *Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya*, the Republic of Tripolitania was proclaimed. It was 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, November 15, 1918, when the following solemn declaration was read to the assembled leaders:

> The Tripolitanian nation has decided to declare its independence, and the proclamation of the republic, with the support of the *ulama*, the notables, and the military commanders who represent all the regions of the country. They have gathered together and elected the members of the Tripolitanian Assembly (*al-Mab'authan*) as well as the members of the Republican Council. This council has begun its activity by announcing this proclamation to the Italian state and to all other states, declaring that the Tripolitanian nation considers itself endowed with independence, hard-won in the struggle of its children over the previous seven years. It claims for itself the right to this constitution, whose purpose is of the most honorable. It extends its congratulations to its citizens, inviting them to band together to defend their religion, their homeland, and their republican government."[20]

The four members of the Republican Council, who were in practice the new masters of Tripolitania, included Ahmed el-Mraied, who represented the Jebel of Tarhuna; Abd en-Nebi Belcher, who controlled the Orfella region and part of the Fezzan; Ramadan al-Shitawi, who was all-powerful in the Misratah region. The fourth member, incredible though it may seem, was Suleiman el-Baruni, who had risen once again to power and gained the highest levels of the government of Tripolitania. This is Mohamed Fekini's attempt to justify the admission of Suleiman as member of the quadrumvirate: "In order to flatter the Ibadites, the notables of Tripolitania decided to appoint Suleiman el-Baruni to the highest leadership, in the hope that his brothers, who were collaborating with the Italians at Zuara, might yet see the errors of their ways."[21]

Among the first actions taken by the new Libyan government was the appointment of Mohamed Fekini as prefect of the *liwa* of Fezzan, "in consideration of the reliance that we place in him, his love for his homeland, and the struggle that he has undertaken to free us from our enemy, and his probity and competence."[22] Among the tasks that were assigned to him were those of making the deserts—inhabited by Arabs, Tuaregs, and Tabous—secure; to mobilize the *mujahideen;* and to monitor the borders with Tunisia. Mohamed Fekini formally accepted the position, but he was by no means content. He knew perfectly well that this prestigious position was nothing other than a way of confining him to far-off Fezzan, so as to allow Suleiman el-Baruni, surely the mastermind behind that appointment, to continue to weave his fraudulent intrigues.

In terms of cunning, though, Mohamed Fekini was every bit Suleiman's equal. Rather than move to Fezzan himself, he appointed as the deputy prefect of the province Mohammed el-Arnauti ben Khalifa Zami, who had previously been the aide to the Turkish prefect, and rapidly moved with his *mujahideen* to the area around el-Azizia to reinforce his front line. This was, in fact, an especially difficult and unsettling period. Everyone expected at any minute a vast offensive to be launched by the Italians, who were receiving a steady flow of reinforcements as a result of the end of the war in Europe. Observers reported that ships were landing troops, artillery, and airplanes at a rate not seen since Caneva's landing in 1911. Mohamed Fekini awaited them calmly, as he had always done in the past. And with the same calm firmness, he opposed Suleiman el-Baruni, fully aware that the final clash with this rival remained still to come.

7

Italy Issues the Statutes

1. Rome's first reaction to the announcement of the establishment of the *Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya* and the intention of the Tripoli government to continue the war until the last Italian had been expelled from the country betrayed emotions of surprise and indignation. The minister for colonies, Gaspare Colosimo, immediately issued instructions to the new governor of Tripoli, General Vincenzo Garioni, to issue no response to the letter from the Tripolitan quadrumvirate, while the minister for foreign affairs, Sidney Sonnino, warned Italy's ambassadors to London, Paris, and Washington that Italy "holds firm the principle of our sovereignty over Libya, as recognized internationally; therefore, in Libya we consider the natives who have taken up arms against us to be rebels."[1]

In a circular letter to the officials of Tripolitania, dated November 11, 1918, Governor Garioni said, among other things,

> The rebels show no signs of laying down their arms, and indeed there are a number of signals that leads us to suppose that they are in fact preparing for more determined resistance and greater activity. The time for rest has not yet drawn near for our troops in Libya. Indeed, Italy is counting on us to ensure that her right is reconfirmed, in her Mediterranean colonies as well. Probably, then, a new military campaign is in the offing here.[2]

Rather than considering the suggestions offered by the American president, Woodrow Wilson, that Italy give its colonies the right of self-determination, Italy instead seemed oriented toward the renewed use of force and sent massive reinforcements of men and materiel to Tripolitania.

In the first few months of 1919, the Italians landed in Tripoli tens of thousands of soldiers, 300 cannons, 1,000 machine guns, 40 airplanes, balloon and spotlight groups, tear gas and poison gas, and a fleet of 700 trucks. This was the basis for equipping three full divisions, one of which was an assault division, under the command of General Gaetano Zoppi. "These warlike troops, animated by the highest esprit, heavily equipped with arms and ammunition, and supported by numerous and powerful artillery pieces," General Pàntano, who commanded one of the three divisions, the 81st Division, wrote, "constituted a formidable instrument of war, the likes of which had perhaps never before been seen in Tripolitania."[3]

Despite the overwhelming Italian superiority, the first offensive against the rebels was unsuccessful. The battles of Zanzur, Gargusa, and Zavia, in fact, were substantially insignificant, and not even the first objective—el-Azizia—was attained. The reasons for this failure, according to Colonel Mezzetti, were political in nature, not military. In fact, he wrote in his memoirs,

> Hard-line pacifist tendencies were beginning to take hold, and my proposal, for a decisive and extreme form of warfare, was rejected. In February, in fact, new orders were issued against attacking the rebels. Native troops were straining at the bit. The numerous chieftains who were on our side or who had recently submitted to our power and were in our camp were expressing serious concerns because they were unable to grasp the reasons for our delays, at a time when we clearly had such a massive deployment of forces available to us.... Our situation, inasmuch as commanders and officers, was especially painful. We sensed that the natives were beginning to sense our political weakness, ill concealed behind our imposing military resources.[4]

General Pàntano shared that view. He wrote,

> Why such favorable circumstances have not been exploited for an imperial reoccupation of the colony, so as to lay down the law to our enemy, and instead we have opted for a slow, painful, inglorious and ambiguous peace negotiation, which only rendered the rebels more impudent and forced Italy to wage a harsh and costly war that lasted for years, I cannot say.... Considering the direction that matters have taken, and reluctant to witness a peace agreement with the rebels treated as equal partners... I asked to be repatriated.[5]

But before leaving Tripoli, General Pàntano was obliged by his superior officers to send the following letter to the leaders of the rebellion:

> Allow me to inform you that General Tarditi, head of the Military Political Office, has sent you a letter. Allow me to list the proposals contained in that letter: "The Italian government is prepared to impose order by force, and has made military preparations, as have you, of course. But before we reach that point, the Italian government feels that it is its duty, and yours as well, to attempt to come to some solutions to all the various problems in an attempt to avoid war. I believe that we should explore all these problems and discuss them in the presence of both parties, in a totally free discussion. That is why I am asking your agreement to these negotiations, and asking you to name a time and place, in response to this letter." In this present letter I am merely repeating what General Tarditi has already written to you, and asking you to address your response to him, in Tripoli.[6]

Having reluctantly completed this last task, General Pàntano exited our history.

2. On practically the same days, there appeared on the scene in Tripoli a new personality who aroused great hopes in both camps. Sadly, he was all too quickly mown down by an early death. His brief life is summarized in a "note" from the General Headquarters of the Ministry for Colonies, as follows:

> Hassan Fekini, about twenty-four years of age, the son of the prominent Tripoli notable Mohamed Fekini, was for two years a student in the Turkish school in Tripoli; subsequently, for two more years, he was a student in Constantinople, and for another four years in Damascus. In 1914 his father asked—and his request was granted—that Hassan Fekini be admitted to study at an Italian boarding school, if possible the International Institute in Turin. Currently the young Hassan is enrolled in his third year studying law at the University of Turin. During his years living in Italy, Hassan Fekini has shown no special skills or talents. His importance therefore derives solely from the prominence of the family to which he belongs.[7]

This superficial judgment would later be radically modified by the ministry for colonies itself, which would in fact count heavily upon Hassan as a new and promising Libyan, one who had moved beyond the tribal mentality, thanks to his studies in Italy. Hassan had made good use of his law studies and had excelled in his classes. He had also developed strong friendships with a number of families in Turin and Rome. The sociologist Gaetano Mosca, a senator of the Kingdom of Italy, for instance, invited him to stay in his home whenever Hassan

was in Rome, and was so impressed with his natural gifts that he came to consider him as a son. Unfortunately, we have very few of Hassan's writings, making it difficult to evaluate him for ourselves. A few of the letters, however, that he wrote to his father Mohamed and his Uncle Fadel are quite significant and show that the young man was, first and foremost, in love with Italy, and that he was eager to work to build a solid bridge between Italy and his own country.

On September 29, 1918, roughly a month before the end of World War One, Hassan wrote a long letter to his father, the first section of which was dedicated to a number of thoughts about the vast massacre still underway in Europe. In the second part of the letter, however, Hassan turned to the issue of his own country, in terms that pointed to his implicit faith in the new direction that Italy seemed to be taking in its colonial policies.

> My dear father, it is now time for you to do everything within your power to restore peace to our unfortunate Tripolitania. It is time for those bent on sowing discord to stop their evil work. The Italian government is determined to turn all its attention, with sincere good intentions and piety, to our land. And what better evidence of their good intentions than having summoned to the task such great peacemakers as generals Tarditi and Garioni? I feel certain that once they arrive there, matters will change. You, for that matter, know them better than anyone else, as shown by our own good intentions and your own loyalty, since they are well aware of all the services you have rendered to the government. His Excellency General Tarditi assured me of his sincere friendship for you and the profound esteem that he feels for you. He loves our country and our people with the most ardent of passions. He is animated by the best of intentions to put an end to the bloodshed and to put our country on the road to progress. And so he is relying upon Italy's true friends. You should therefore extend the hand of friendship to him and help him, and I pray to Allah that he may crown your work with success.[8]

In the previously mentioned "note" of the ministry for colonies it is stated that "in February 1919, the young Hassan Fekini, whom we considered to be a hostage, was sent from Turin to Tripoli, where it was believed that his presence would facilitate restoration of our ties to his family."[9] But Hassan, as we know, had done a great deal more than merely to reconcile the Fekinis with the government in Tripoli. He had also persuaded them collaborate with Generals Garioni and Tarditi to support the pacification between the two peoples that everyone expected and hoped for. In other words, in defiance of the

first, over-hasty judgement issued by the ministry for colonies, the young Hassan rightly joined the ranks of those few individuals who were working to bring Tripolitania out of chaos, choosing the path of negotiations rather than open warfare.

3. The Minister for Colonies Colosimo and the governor of Tripolitania Garioni had come to the decision to postpone any military offensive, despite the fact that by this point, 80,000 soldiers had massed in Tripolitania, and instead to pursue negotiations, for a series of quite reasonable considerations. Even though they had manpower in place they decided to negotiate because they knew the war would be long and costly and they had seen elsewhere (Cyrenaica) that negotiations had proven effective.[10] Finally, both Colosimo and Garioni were well aware that it was impossible to break up from outside the alliance that had given rise to the *Jumhuriyah*, since it was proving to be—not a temporary and unimportant organization—but rather a clear product of Arab nationalism, which was manifesting itself, in various forms, in every country of the Maghreb.

On the basis of these and other considerations, Colosimo and Garioni authorized General Giuseppe Tarditi to begin negotiations with the leaders of the *Jumhuriyah*.[11] The first meeting between the two parties took place on March 9, 1919, in the town of Khallet ez-Zeitun, about 40kilometers (22 miles) outside of Tripoli, in Arab-controlled territory. Aside from the two delegations, also present were the very young Hassan, Mohamed Fekini's firstborn son; and the son of Ramadan al-Shitawi, Ahmed. Both young men had been taken hostage by the Italians, some time earlier, and had been held in Italy. Their liberation constituted a first sign of détente.

"Many tents were erected for both Italians and for Arabs,"[12] Mohamed Fekini writes in his memoirs.

> Two or three times a week the delegates assembled in a specially equipped site in the camp, to discuss every issue, but especially the position of the governor of Tripoli and the role of Rome. The Muslims requested a prince for Tripolitania, just as France had provided for Tunisia. But Rome refused, because Tunisia had spontaneously placed itself under a French protectorate, while Tripolitana had been conquered in war against the Ottomans.[13]

From the very outset, therefore, the negotiations promised to be troublesome. In part, this was because the Arab delegation included the young Egyptian nationalist Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, who

represented the most intransigent faction. He was in favor of persuading the other chieftains to demand independence for Tripolitania and the preservation of the republican regime, giving Italy nothing more than a vague right to a protectorate. Other notables, instead, asked that Tripolitania be made an independent state, guide by a Muslim emir but subject to an Italian protectorate.

4. These demands were unacceptable to Colosimo and Garioni, who were only willing to concede to the Tripolitanians the civil and political liberties that had already been promised so many times (and never delivered) since 1911. Therefore, following the meetings of March 9 and 31 and April 10, all rather stormy and inconclusive, Governor Garioni sent a letter with an ultimatum to Ramadan al-Shitawi; in that letter, he warned that the Italians were willing to meet their counterparts on the condition that in this new conference all that could be discussed were the concessions included in the government program. Any other demands would spell the end of negotiations. The ultimatum of Tripoli rended the chiefs of the *Jumhuriyah* more cautious and conciliatory. On the evening of April 15, Ramadan al-Shitawi responded to Garioni by accepting a final and resolutory meeting on the morning of April 16, at 10 a.m., with the conditions demanded.

As Mohamed Fekini recalled in his memoirs, the last few hours prior to the meeting were characterized by a feverish activity:

> After a conversation among themselves and with the sheiks of Sanusiya, in Cyrenaica, and with the Egyptian advisor Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, the notables of Tripolitania decided by majority rule to sign the peace treaty, establishing as a condition the concession by Italy of a Fundamental Law that would ensure the rights of Muslims.[14]

On April 16, in fact, the Arab delegates showed up for their appointment, punctually, and after eight hours of intense conversation, the agreement was made. "The discussion was long and laborious," Garioni reported to Minister Colosimo in a report dated April 18,

> but the overall agreement was achieved with small additions and modifications, that do not shift at all the general outlines of the government's program, thus preserving intact the concept of our absolute

> sovereignty and confirming the concession of a sui generis citizenship, entirely special and local, with the consequential right of the population to participate effectively in the administration of the country.[15]

While waiting for all the chiefs of Tripolitania to assemble at Funduq Ben Ghashir to sign the agreement, General Garioni did not withdraw his orders to the expeditionary force to be ready to unleash its offensive, with the clear intention of maintaining pressure upon those Arab chieftains who might still be reluctant. On April 17, he issued orders to the troops to advance along a 50-kilometer (30-mile) front at his signal. The 81st Division, which was moving out from the bases of Zanzur and Zavia, had as its objectives Suani Ben Adem and Bir Terrina; the 38th Division was to occupy Funduq Ben Ghashir, the place where the Arab chieftains were to assemble; while the 1st Assault Division was held in reserve between Funduq et-Tugar and the oasis of Zanzur.

"During the night of 17 April," reported the youthful Colonel Rodolfo Graziani, who would before long become Mohamed Fekini's most implacable adversary,

> while officers and men stood variously deployed, ready to surge forward in pursuit of the longed-for and expected military victory that would spell a reversal of the situation, and offer vengeance for all the checks and humiliations suffered from 1915 on, the report was circulated of peace agreement with the rebels, and the consequential cessation of hostilities. And so in what was known, almost ironically, as the Peace of Khallet ez-Zeitun (Valley of Olive Trees), all shadows of our effective sovereignty over Tripolitania seemed to fade away once and for all, and the ground was prepared for new, grave humiliations, with a policy of renunciation, similar to the policy that 1919 had already seen established in our homeland, Italy.[16]

5. On the afternoon of April 21, in the tent of Ramadan al-Shitawi, at Khallet ez-Zeitun, Italians and Arabs signed the outline of the statute which, with a few minor modifications made by the ministry for colonies, would then be promulgated on the first of June. An eyewitness to the signing ceremony, Colonel Vacca Maggiolini, offered this description of the meeting and the attitudes of the Arab chieftains: "The ready and sincere enthusiasm with which they rose that evening

to acclaim Italy, both victorious and generous, powerful and liberal, persuaded me at the time, and still causes me to believe today, that they had only the most sincere of intentions to live from that day forward in cordial harmony with the Italians, whom they truly wished to consider brothers."[17]

On the first of June 1919, as we have said, Governor Garioni announced to the Tripolitanians that the statute had been issued.

> By virtue of this act, the inhabitants of Tripolitania are elevated to the moral and political status of citizens, guaranteed the same rights as are assured here to Italian citizens, and are invited to join in the government of public weal and the administration of the territory in broadest and most concrete form, in a regime of liberty and civil progress, which is a secure token for them of a bright future.[18]

Basically, the Fundamental Pact—or Libyan Statute, as it would more widely be termed—sanctioned by Law 931, contained in its 40 articles the following innovations: 1) the institution of colonial subjection was abolished, and the natives were accorded "an Italian citizenship of Tripolitania," distinct from metropolitan citizenship; 2) obligatory military service and the draft were replaced with voluntary service in the local armed forces; 3) a local parliament was established, made up of elected representatives of the populations and members by right; 4) the Arabic language was given absolute equality to the Italian language, even in official documents; 5) freedom of the press and of assembly were recognized; 6) taxes would be brought into line with the taxes in effect in the Ottoman Empire; 7) private teaching was free, but the government, through its functionaries, would monitor it; 8) finally, the Tripolitanians could form part of the governing council and the regional, local, district, and municipal councils, which were all elective bodies.

This was not a truly democratic institution because it gave the Libyans only a very limited role. And yet, for all its shortcomings, had it been implemented, the Libyan Statute might well have given a voice to a people that had long been repressed and humiliated. Instead, as we shall see, neither the parliament nor the other institution would ever come into operation in Tripolitania because there were many who were determined to sabotage the Fundamental Pact; among them were a number of Libyans.

In his memoirs, Mohamed Fekini lists with great satisfaction the concessions won from Italy, some of which he himself had suggested

during the negotiations. Once again, he had succeeded in drawing upon his 30 years of experience as a senior Ottoman functionary. In recognition of his crucial contribution to the drafting of the statute, Fekini was appointed as a member of the governing council, which was chaired by the governor of Tripolitania himself, and composed of eight Arab members[19] and two Italian ones appointed by the governor. Fekini also recalls the great festivities, which lasted three days, in celebration of the peace treaty and the promulgation of the statute. He wrote,

> The procession entered Tripoli with the eight members of the Governing Council at its head, followed by prefects, princes, and *mujahideen*. There were three thousand men and two thousand horses. Outside of the city walls, they were welcomed by the governor of the province, by the highest-ranking officers in the army, and by the soldiers of the guard. Outside the wall, thousands of tents were erected. An arena was also set up for the performance of the ritual evolutions and maneuvers. Moreover, volleys of cannon rounds were fired, while a number of airplanes flew overhead.[20]

6. These magnificent celebrations and the respect that Governor Garioni expressed toward the Arab notables could hardly fail to arouse the annoyance of officers such as Rodolfo Graziani, who commented in these words upon the atmosphere of that optimistic June:

> In the meantime Tripoli was buzzing with the preparations for a spectacular welcoming ceremony and demonstration, themselves unprecedented acts of devotion, on behalf of the notables who were coming to represent a people to whom, for the first time in centuries, a heady brew of liberty was being offered.... Politics, an accommodating, hesitant, irresolute politics, was blathering away with all its minor acts of cunning and its perfidious cowardice, murmuring nervously under its breath: "We are all brothers!" This was of course 1919: a year of demagoguery and failure for Italy.[21]

Despite Graziani's hatred and sarcasm, which was echoed by many other officers, in the first few months following the agreement of Khallet ez-Zeitun, it seemed as if everything were proceeding nicely. The Italian prisoners, who had been in Arab hands since 1915, were promptly freed. The Italian "liaison officers" were allowed to

take up residence without problems in all the towns that had previously housed Italian garrisons and to collaborate actively with the Arab authorities. And while the *mujahideen* began to make their first deliveries of weapons, the government of Tripoli reciprocated by undertaking its own disarmament process by repatriating groups of the expeditionary force. In fact, of the 80,000 soldiers present in Tripolitania in April, there were no more than 25,000 by August of that year. It was also reassuring, as Mohamed Fekini writes, to see every day, in the government palace, the assembly of the ten members of the Council, together with the governor, a secretary, and an interpreter. The meetings ran from 2:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon. At prayer time, the Muslim members of the council moved off to perform their religious rituals in the mosque located inside the walls of the *es-Sarai*, the ancient castle built by the Turks, which now housed the government.[22]

To give the finishing touch to the idyllic scene, on August 16, 1919, General Garioni left Tripoli and, for the first time in the history of the Italian colony, a civilian arrived to take over the government, the career prefect Vittorio Menzinger, who had already served as prefect of Tripoli in 1912. This changing of the guard, just a little over a month after the concession of the statute, was neither expected nor advisable. The fact that Garioni, who had done more than anyone else on behalf of the agreement with the Libyans and who had successfully brought it about, should have been relieved of command remained an incomprehensible act, even though it was clear that the Italian prime minister, Francesco Saverio Nitti, by appointing a civilian to govern in Tripoli, certainly meant to send a clear signal of peace.

To render yet more complete the demobilization of the group of soldiers that had made possible the agreement of Khallet ez-Zeitun, General Tarditi was summoned back to Italy as well. In a letter dated September 22, 1919, the general informed Mohamed Fekini that he had received a telegram from Rome that required him to return to Italy as quickly as possible to accompany a member of the royal family on a trip. "I appeal to God," Tarditi wrote, "and I call upon him to ensure that this new period in our collaboration should be a time of prosperity and happiness, and that the ties of brotherhood and friendship become only stronger between our two nations, Tripolitania and Italy."[23] In his farewell to Mohamed Fekini, whom he greatly respected and who in turn respected him, the man who had supervised the negotiations for the Italian side, described Tripolitania as

a “nation” and placed it on an equal footing with Italy. It was the final and significant recognition that Tarditi offered a people who had courageously fought for seven years and who, it was hoped, was finally at the end of its ordeal. But such was not the case. After a brief pause, the war was to bring afresh even more harshness and violence than before.

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8

The Death of Hassan

1. The first person to cause a dangerous rift in the Fundamental Pact was not an Italian at all, although there were many Italians who strongly resisted the idea of an understanding with their "Arab brothers"; it was a Libyan, Ramadan al-Shitawi, the lord of the Misratah area. It should be pointed out, nonetheless, that the man who triumphed over Mohammed Safi ed-Din would in all likelihood have refrained from taking harmful initiatives if General Garioni had been left to govern Tripolitania. General Garioni actually enjoyed considerable prestige in the Arab and Berber society of the colony, but his successor, Vittorio Menzinger, was neither a skilled politician nor a man of authority. He was an untalented bureaucrat, without imagination or any particular sense of initiative. It is sufficient to read his reports to the ministry for colonies, drawn up with a stumbling, uncertain vocabulary, to understand that he was absolutely incapable of guiding or controlling the larger situation or carrying forward the application of the Libyan Statute. Moreover, those reports are symptomatic of his bent for intrigue but cheap intrigue. He tended to dabble in entirely counterproductive schemes.

The first reaction among the Arab leaders to Menzinger's inept delays and dithering—for instance, one full year after the promulgation of the Statute, none of the institutions that it called for had yet been implemented—was the creation of a Central Reform Committee,[1] officially meant to assist the governor in his work on the implementation of the Statute. In reality, however, the committee had been founded for the purpose of improving the terms of the Fundamental Pact and to pursue the demands for independence, or at least greater autonomy, that had been so soundly rejected at Khallet ez-Zeitun. But the disagreements among the tribes and the various

leaders were still too controversial and numerous for the Central Reform Committee to succeed in achieving an authentically unifying and nationalist character.

The members of the committee were, nonetheless, well aware of how fragile the structures of Tripolitanian society remained, to the point that on January 19, 1920, they drew up a "Conventional Pact," with seven points, in order to ensure that they would be able to enjoy full use of their newly won rights. It was necessary, therefore, to come to an agreement on these points: (1) respect and absolute safeguarding of the rules of the Fundamental Law and maintenance of a general peace that would prevent the shedding of Muslim blood; (2) immediate arrest of anyone who violates the rules of the Fundamental Law. Individualism would be considered a transgression of the Fundamental Law; (3) no one could make independent decisions on matters that affected general affairs or interests. The agreement of one and all was necessary; (4) all the signatories of the "Conventional Pact" enjoyed equal standing. Decisions were to be made by majority rules; (5) no one had the right to make decisions concerning the rules of this Pact without unanimous agreement; (6) all changes would be considered legal only if they had beneficial effects on the country at large and had won unanimous consensus; (7) after signing the Pact, all signatories would be obliged to adhere strictly and for all time to its rules.[2]

The decision to formulate this Conventional Pact had been taken at a time when, just six months after the issuance of the Statute, disagreements had flared up among a number of Arab chieftains, and the colony had entered a new period of turbulence. The disagreements were the products of age-old resentments, such as the feud between Ramadan al-Shitawi and his rival Abd en-Nebi Belcher, and of more recent events, such as the conflicts over the sharing out of the Turkish-German treasury and the surrender of weapons to the Tripoli government. On that last mentioned point, for instance, Ramadan al-Shitawi disagreed with all the other leaders, who were in favor of a prompt delivery of the various arsenals; he, in contrast, advocated delay.

Moreover, the master of the Misratah area demanded that the district of Orfella should be placed under the jurisdiction of Khoms, which he controlled. But the members of the Governing Council rejected this demand on the grounds that the administrative subdivision of Tripolitania was not subject to change and should reflect the boundaries of the Ottoman era. The Governing Council therefore appointed Mohamed Fekini, Ali es-Shanta, and Sheik Ahmed el-Badawi to go to see Ramadan al-Shitawi at Zanzur and to recommend

that he moderate his position. Ramadan, however, refused to listen to the advice of the notables, and with a group of armed men, he traveled to Jebel Garian, where the cannons and ammunition had been stored, with the intention of making use of them to occupy the Orfella region.[3]

The behavior adopted by Ramadan al-Shitawi, which his adversaries considered to be provocative and unacceptable, caused a general state of alarm, both in the Tripoli government and among a number of Arab chieftains, who hastened to form a sort of anti-Misratah coalition, appointing as the leader of this coalition the chief of Tarhuna, Ahmed el-Mraied. In response, Ramadan al-Shitawi established an alliance with the Koobar brothers of Garian and with Khalifa ben Askar of Nalut. This meant that two major alliances were developing in Tripolitania, and this might well drag the nation, already exhausted and thrown into disarray by the long colonial war, into a new war—this time, however, a civil war. In this context, a powerful and centralist governor who had some talent as a mediator might well have exerted a moderating influence, with a good possibility of restoring calm in the country. Menzinger, however, had none of the qualities that the situation demanded.

The growing tension between the two factions could hardly fail, over time, to provoke incidents. On March 15, 1920, on the very same day that Menzinger would be inaugurating the new railroad line between Tripoli and Zuara, Khalifa ben Askar demolished the antenna of the radio station of Nalut and ordered the Italian liaison officer and his eight men to leave the area immediately. A few days later, the staff of the liaison office of Riaina was forced to return to Tripoli. Thrown into a state of alarm by the expulsion of the liaison officers of Nalut and Riaina, instead of investigating the causes underlying the two episodes and taking, once and for all, a nonpartisan stance in an attempt to bring peace to the country, Governor Menzinger yet again made the wrong move by ordering the liaison office of Misratah, which was staffed by about 50 soldiers and functionaries, to return immediately to Tripoli. With this imperious gesture, he definitively broke off the already complicated relations with Ramadan al-Shitawi and openly announced that the Tripoli government was throwing its unqualified support behind the coalition of Ahmed el-Mraied.

The ensuing situation was so chaotic that the adversaries of the Fundamental Law, both Italian and Arab, immediately mobilized in an attempt to eliminate it entirely. As Mohamed Fekini recalls,

> El-Baruni and his Ibadite supporters, who were doing their best to sabotage the agreement with the Italians, took immediate advantage of the situation. Suleiman left for Rome, where he met with those who opposed the Fundamental Law and won assurances, in the case that the law was withdrawn, that he would be given control over the western Jebel. Pressure was brought to bear and promises were made, as well, to Ramadan al-Shitawi by a group of Italians operating in Misratah."[4]

Again, in the case that the Fundamental Law was abrogated, and he succeeded in occupying Orfella and Tarhuna—despite the opposition of Abd en-Nebi Belcher and Ahmed el-Mraied, he would be appointed ruler over Tripolitania as a whole, with Garian as his capital.[5]

The numerous changes in the office of minister for colonies—there were four different ministers over the course of just a few months—unfortunately resulted in the continuance of Menzinger as governor in Tripoli and hindered the implementation of a clear and consistent political line for Tripolitania. In June 1920, Hassan Fekini, Mohamed Fekini's oldest son who had been working for some time with his father in the administration of the western Jebel, was summoned to Rome by the undersecretary for colonies, the Honorable Parlatore.[6] The prime reason that he was summoned was in all likelihood the fact that Hassan spoke Italian perfectly; had lived in Italy for a number of years and had a clear and balanced understanding of Italian society; and finally, the possibility that he might exert a beneficial influence upon his father, who was fiercely defending the Libyan Statute but who had also been one of the most vehement opponents of Italy's presence in Tripolitania.

According to a document from the Political Office of the government in Tripoli, Hassan Fekini traveled with Professor Enrico Firpo, a functionary of the colonial government, passing through Malta on June 13, and arriving in Italy two days later.[7] We have very little information about the actual meeting between Hassan Fekini and the Italian ministerial authorities. Mohamed Fekini, in his memoirs, wrote: "In Rome, the Minister for Colonies asked Hassan Bey to urge his father to make an alliance with Suleiman el-Baruni. Together, they would have been given control of the mountains, part of the Sahara, and Fezzan."[8] But Fekini viewed the minister's proposal as nothing more than a further contrivance in the ongoing attempt to bring ruin to the *vilayet* and destroy once and for all the Fundamental Law.[9] All too obvious, as well, was the tactic of offering each chieftain a portion of power in the hope of creating dissent and stoking age-old rivalries.

In any case, Fekini continued to place his reliance in the Fundamental Law and to hope that it succeeded in surviving all the machinations and intrigues. And he moved to his house in Tripoli in order to be able to attend all the sessions of the Governing Council.

2. Over the previous few months, before beginning the demented march toward Beni Ulid that would ultimately lead to his death, Ramadan al-Shitawi was working feverishly, with letters and documents sent to the Italian authorities, to disprove the infamous accusations that Governor Menzinger leveled against him insistently, in particular in the Italian press.[10] He wrote, for instance, to the minister for colonies, Ruini,

> The developments in local politics, against which I have fought for many months, have led us into a very grave crisis. This crisis demands the intervention of the central government, because our country is tipping into an exceedingly dangerous state of turmoil and unrest. I am perfectly willing to exercise all of my authority and do my best to ensure that peace prevails and that the Statute is implemented, providing that I am given new bases from which to oppose the politics of separatism and personal interests.[11]

Again, on August 8, 16 days before he was killed at Beni Ulid, Ramadan al-Shitawi sent a very long note (eight pages) to Prime Minister Giolitti, advising him to beware of those who were exerting every effort to foment a civil war in Tripolitania. He wrote, among other things: "The politics of corruption and secret agreements between the government and a group of functionaries, notables, and spies has only reinforced the lining of their stomachs so that they are now able to digest as much gold and paper money as can be stuffed into them." Again he invoked,

> an agreement between Italy and the Arabs on a foundation of trust, and we believe that such an understanding is possible. Therefore, we are employing patience, and we recommend patience as a general policy until you have considered and explored the things that we have set forth, and until your excellency has devoted sufficient time to understand the truth about our homeland.[12]

It is difficult to understand, after reading this memo to Giolitti, and especially the phrase in which Ramadan stated clearly that he would be patient and recommended patience to others, why, on August 24,

1920, when it was already well known that Menzinger had been replaced, he should have decided to break the siege of the Misratah area, long instituted by the followers of Abd en-Nebi Belcher and trigger the outbreak of a civil war. Ramadan al-Shitawi crossed the threshold into illegality at the very moment that his name was being pronounced with the greatest respect in Italy[13] and just as he was emerging the victor from the harsh clash with Menzinger. However much it ran counter to apparent good sense, he sprang into action just 48 hours before the new governor, Luigi Mercatelli, landed in Tripoli. It was clear that he would have a much easier time finding common ground with this new governor, if for no other reason than that, within the ministry for colonies, Mercatelli had never considered him "a dangerous monster."

In the absence of any reliable documentation, we can only look to conjectures in our attempts to understand Ramadan al-Shitawi's actions. In our opinion, his actions seem to have been prompted more by a general state of desperation than by any specfic and rational reasoning. He was a skilled guerrilla warrior, and he had survived ten years of bitter fighting against the Italians. And yet he left the safety of Misratah to venture out to challenge his rival, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, who was safely ensconced in the inaccessible Beni Ulid; moreover, he forgot to provide the necessary supplies of water for the two thousand men of his *mehallas*. "This was an inexplicable error on the part of a native," Rodolfo Graziani correctly pointed out, "he overlooked the issue of water supplies for his *mehallas* to such a degree that though they did arrive in Beni Ulid by surprise, they were prostrate with thirst and incapable of combat. His soldiers were offering their rifles to the Orfella women in exchange for goatskins filled with water."[14]

We must therefore presume that the expedition was a last-minute decision, implemented on the spur of the moment, without the normal precautions that any desert Arab would have taken. Perhaps he had learned that his adversaries were about to attack him, and he decided to beat them to the punch with a furious and unexpected preemptive strike.[15] But let us explore the version of events left by Charaf Addin, the commander of Ramadan al-Shitawi's artillery: "We began our move with our departure from Misratah. Our force consisted of 690 soldiers and 16 officers. Our equipment included cannons with 240 shells (15 per crate), two bulletproof screens, two loads of cartridges, 350 camels loaded with ammunition and provisions. As for Ramadan al-Shitawi, he began his move with his departure from Msellata with 200 horsemen and joined us in the valley of Bir Dufan. Another 550

horsemen joined us, arriving from every direction. Subsequently, we divided these forces into two groups: the first group included the soldiers commanded by Ibrahim Aawad, who formed the forward contingent. Following them were the horsemen of the second group, commanded by Ramadan.

"We all headed for the Orfella region. We were tired and we had had no water for an entire day. On August 24, we arrived at Beni Ulid, and fighting broke out immediately, lasting from morning till night, without the slightest possibility for us to slake our thirst. Despite our thirst, we continued our attack. The enemy successfully resisted for four hours and then received reinforcements. In the meanwhile, many of our men died of thirst. Then we were surrounded, in the midst of great confusion, and we were forced to surrender.[16]

Thus runs the dramatic account provided by Charaf Addin, a clear confirmation of the overhasty and disorderly preparations for the expedition. Ramadan al-Shitawi did succeed in occupying Beni Ulid at dawn on August 24, but not the wells of the oasis, which remained under Orfella control. At the head of a thirst-weakened horde exhausted from a long and brutal march and by violent fighting, by this point unable to break out of the encirclement that held him captive, the most renowned of all the *mujahideen* of Tripolitania sat waiting for the death blow, a blow that would be delivered by the very men alongside whom he had fought the Italian invaders for so many years. Captured in the aftermath of a long and ferocious battle, he was led in chains to the place where he would be brought into the presence of his great rival. But he never made it there alive; one of the guards escorting him shot him dead at point-blank range.

Torn between the honorable intention of defending to the death the Fundamental Pact and the lust to deliver a decisive blow against his great rival, Ramadan al-Shitawi made, as it were, a wrong turn, and entered a dead-end road. He lost his life and, at the same time, provided fodder for those keen to destroy the Libyan Statute. Upon their return from Beni Ulid, Colonel Bocca and Lieutenant Macario described the scene of the battle in these words: "The dead in this town numbered roughly three hundred; the prisoners, some seven hundred. The dead lie stripped of all clothing, still unburied, including Ramadan."[17] The day in Beni Ulid truly had been one of horror. This intertribal massacre bespoke serious shortcomings in the Libyan movement, a movement that was supposed to work for the implementation of the Statute.

3. With the elimination of Ramadan al-Shitawi from the Libyan stage, there remained Khalifa ben Askar as a military force; we can see, from the many letters of complaint and protest sent to Mohamed Fekini, that Khalifa ben Askar had resumed his attacks on the Arab villages of the Jebel, repeating his offenses of long-ago 1916.[18] On July 14, 1920, four members of the Governing Council, specifically Mohamed Fekini, Ali es-Shanta, Ahmed el-Fassatawi, and Mohammed el-Sowayi, sent the following letter to Governor Menzinger, who was on the verge of leaving his office:

> Since Khalifa ben Askar and Sheik Mohammed el-Chin are in Tripoli, we herewith beg you to detain them in the city until our arrival, so that we may discuss with you the best actions to be taken with regard to them. If they are allowed to leave before our arrival, we will not consider ourselves responsible for the serious acts they may subsequently undertake.[19]

Menzinger, on the verge of leaving office, was careful to refrain from taking any action at all, leaving it up to his successor, Luigi Mercatelli, to resolve the age-old Arab-Berber feud, a feud that Menzinger had unwisely worsened, instead of doing anything to pacify the warring parties. The Berbers had been expelled from the Jebel for the first time in 1916, and they had returned to their homes in Fassatu, Nalut, and Yafran three years later in the wake of the Khallet ez-Zeitun agreements. A short period of peace and tranquility followed, but at the beginning of 1920, the Berbers were once again involved in a bitter disagreement with the Arabs. Rendering the conflict even harsher was the alliance between the Berber chieftain Khalifa ben Askar and Ramadan al-Shitawi, as a result of which, as the reader will recall, Khalifa had ejected the Italian liaison officers from Nalut and Riaina.

When Mercatelli took up his responsibilities at the end of August as governor of Tripolitania, the clash between Arabs and Berbers was already raging. By early September, the general secretary of the government, Ugo Niccoli, summoned the Governing Council to a meeting and suggested immediately sending Hassan Fekini to the Jebel, where he would perform an inspection and perhaps work to restore order there. Mohamed Fekini opposed this proposal[20] because he was all too well acquainted with Khalifa ben Askar and his skill at weaving plots. But the other members of the Governing Council supported Niccoli's proposal and the young Hassan, proud to be sent on such

an important mission, immediately agreed to carry out the inspection with no consideration for the risks involved and his own lack of experience.

Once the young Hassan reached the western Jebel, he quickly realized that the situation in the region was far more serious and explosive than he had supposed. Khalifa ben Askar had attacked Josh, killing the *kaymakam* Ibrahim Abou al-Ahbass, destroying his properties, and imprisoning his gendarmes. At this point, Hassan Fekini came to the realization that his job was no longer to carry out inspections and then report back to the government in Tripoli but rather to prevent Khalifa ben Askar from carrying out further acts of violence. After discarding the hypothesis of attempting to mediate, Hassan left Josh and traveled to the region where the Rojeban and Zintan lived; there he hoped to assemble a sufficient number of fighting men to take on Khalifa ben Askar.

On September 12, the young Hassan was ready to challenge Khalifa at the head of several hundred footsoldiers and horsemen. The battle took place at Oum al Qourb, in a valley between the regions of the Rehibat and the Harabah; it lasted the entire day. When evening fell, Khalifa ben Askar withdrew defeated, having lost his nephew, the son of Mohammed al-Chin and dozens of soldiers.[21] But as Mohamed Fekini had foreseen, the Berber leader was not the sort of man who could be disheartened by a mere defeat, and the next day, after bribing part of the enemy force to defect, he attacked again, and this time in the town of el-Giblet, he was victorious over the Arab warriors and put them to flight.

This is how Mohamed Fekini describes the last hours in the life of his son Hassan:

> Following the defeat, Hassan Bey, his uncle Massaud, and the other Arabs withdrew to Taredia, pursued by the enemy. Hassan managed to reach the Fekini home; there he found his grandmother Oufaya, the mother of Mohamed Fekini. He told her to mount behind him on his wounded horse, with the intention of continuing his escape, but soon the enemies caught up with them. The horse was hit again, and plunged to earth. The old woman was thrown to the ground, while Hassan, wounded in the foot, attempted to continue to flee toward Qasr el-Hajj. As he fled, he met his uncle Massaud, and together, on foot, they fled together, but the enemy soon caught up with them. At a certain point, Massaud vanished and Hassan, left alone, was surrounded by his adversaries. Although he was wounded and tormented by thirst—it was summer, and very hot—Hassan fired back, killing many of the

> enemy, but then his turn came and he was fatally wounded, in a place called al-Aydiyah, about an hour's ride from Qasr el-Hajj. May Allah welcome him into his holy abode. This good young man died at the age of just twenty-five.[22]

A number of photographs taken on the site of the final battle allow us to reconstruct Hassan's last moments. Pursued closely by Khalifa ben Askar's men, no longer capable of walking because of the wound in his foot, the young man threw himself to the ground, seeking protection behind a boulder. From his position, he continued to fire his Italian rifle[23] until he had used up all the ammunition. He was immediately surrounded and riddled with bullets. Even today, it is still possible to see the bullet marks on the boulder. Two days after his death, Saad, an employee of Mohamed Fekini, found his body and buried it where the young man had been killed. Next to the boulder, a simple tomb was built, using stones found on the site.[24] Around the tomb is a harsh barren desert landscape, dotted with occasional thorn bushes. High above on a hill are the houses of Taredia, the village where Hassan was born.

Hassan had every quality necessary to be happy and to bring happiness to others: physical beauty, courage, extraordinary intelligence, and the gift of leadership along with his other talents. He was wealthy and influential by birth, and only a few more exams stood between him and his law degree.[25] Both in Italy and in Tripolitania, he had won many friends because he was considered a new man, with remarkably broad horizons and cultural learning. Certainly, he did not imagine—the day that he accepted, with youthful enthusiasm, the assignment to ride up onto the Jebel to restore peace—that his life would end in this jumble of rocks, far from the beaten paths, lightly swept by the winds.

4. As soon as he learned of the battle in the Jebel and the tragic fate of his son Hassan, Mohamed Fekini secretly left Tripoli and, with his family, moved to el-Azizia. It was not yet a full-fledged break with the government, but it was a powerful and unmistakable signal. As soon as he arrived in el-Azizia, Fekini issued a statement to the Arabic and Italian press that was, substantially, a furious accusation against the Tripoli government:

> A great disaster has struck us, the result of having attempted to defend and apply the Fundamental Law, of demanding respect for this law

> that is in the interest of our beloved country and our dear fellow citizens. The government's apparent attitude led us to believe that it was on our side, but in reality the supporters of Suleiman el-Baruni and suspicious actions of the commander of Zuara, Colonel Mezzetti, as well as the government's secretary general, Niccoli, clearly show that they actually supported Khalifa ben Askar in clear violation of this law. They brought him to Tripoli and supplied him with cash, weapons, and ammunition from the stockpiles of Zuara. We have informed the government of these treacherous and fraudulent actions with telegrams and resolutions, but to no avail. And, even worse, they provided troops to wage war against the Zintan and the Rojeban.

Continuing his accusation, Mohamed Fekini stated that the inhabitants of the villages destroyed by Khalifa ben Askar had been forced to take refuge in Sorman and el-Azizia, in pitiful conditions: "I asked the governor to come to their aid by providing them with food and clothing, as is customary in all civilized countries, but as of this writing he has done nothing."[26] Mercatelli immediately responded to Fekini's accusations, denying that he had provided any support to Khalifa ben Askar and, indeed, blaming the Arab chieftain for having organized meetings of notables at el-Azizia with the aim "not of reconciliation, but war. At this rate, it is you that provoke disasters and multiply the number of victims."[27]

At this point, Fekini, with the support of three other members of the Governing Council who had joined him in el-Azizia, made no reply to Governor Mercatelli but instead sent a telegram directly to the ministry for colonies, reiterating his accusations against the government in Tripoli:

> With the aid of the support that has been given him, Khalifa ben Askar has attacked the villages of the Rojeban; he has burnt their homes and murdered old people, women, and children. Without the government's help, he would have been incapable of advancing an inch into our region, nor could he have killed the deputy prefect of Josh and other innocent victims. This is the reason why we are protesting forcefully against these people and those who have come to their assistance, and we demand that they be placed under arrest and brought before a court of law.[28]

Once Mercatelli was informed by Rome of the contents of Mohamed Fekini's telegram, he sent the Arab chieftain and government adviser two letters, reiterating the position that the government had played absolutely no part in the fraudulent maneuvers that Fekini

had denounced, but his explanations are eloquent of an intensely awkward sense of embarrassment and only the scantiest knowledge of the situation in any detail. In the first letter, he extended his condolences to Fekini for the death of his son, with these words: "When we learned the sad news we were deeply moved because we all knew your son as a man who loved his own country and respected our country. We had great hopes for his future, and all those who knew him personally deeply respected and sincerely loved him. I can assure you that I saw tears in my officials' eyes when they received confirmation of the sad news."[29]

Among the numerous declarations of sorrow that he received, Mohamed Fekini had especially appreciated the words of Italian Senator Gaetano Mosca, who informed him that on November 28, he had eulogized Hassan during a session of the Royal Italian Senate. He wrote, among other things:

> I felt a great fondness for your son because he had an extremely rare gentlemanliness of habit, which comes as no surprise, considering the values and virtues of his Arabic origins. He was loyal, steadfast, honest, and generous, and his death truly saddened me. It is as if I lost one of my own children. May God have mercy upon his soul. I will never forget the virtuous young man, who always tried to outdo his colleagues in their studies. My own sons will never forget him because they loved him like a brother. Would you please send me a photograph of him to remember him by? May God console you and keep you.[30]

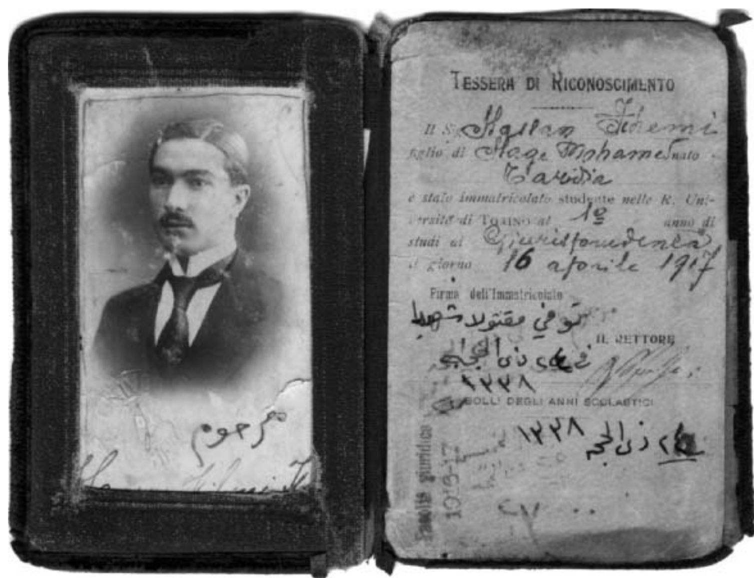
In Italy, then, there were still people capable of singing the praises of an Arab, people who did not consider an Arab an inferior being, and in fact were unembarrassed to consider him as a son. But how many others could express the same feelings as the remarkable Senator Mosca?



Image 1 Hajj Mohamed Khalifa Fekini, chief of the Rojeban, age 53, at the time of the Italian landing in Tripoli. He was one of the first chiefs in Tripolitania to take up the armed struggle against the invaders and succeeded in inflicting a bloody blow against General Caneva at Shara Shatt. When Italy, in 1919, conceded a Statute to the Libyans, he immediately became their strenuous advocate, in the illusion that it would be possible to establish a fruitful collaboration between the two peoples. In 1922, the Fascist state reneged upon its liberal concessions, and Mohamed Fekini resumed the battle, carrying it on for ten years in the Ghibla and in Fezzan. Obliged to take the path of exile, in 1930, he led his tribes across the deserts of Algeria and Tunisia during the two-year-long exodus. He died at Gabes in 1950, aged 92, venerated almost as a saint.



Image 2 Hassan Fekini, Mohamed's firstborn son. After studying at the lyceum in Damascus, Syria, he enrolled in 1917 in the school of law at the University of Turin. He loved Italian culture and Italian society, and he entertained the illusion that it would be possible to build, on a basis of equality, a bridge between the two civilizations. Assigned by the government in Tripoli to put down a revolt in the Jebel, he died in combat against the Berber chieftain Khalifa ben Askar. Italian Senator Gaetano Mosca, who thought of him as a son, paid tribute to him in the Italian parliament. He died at the age of 24.


TESSERA DI RICONOSCIMENTO

Il S. Hassan Fekini
figlio di Hage Mohamed nato
è stato immatricolato studente nella R. Università di TORINO al 1° anno di studi di Giurisprudenza
il giorno 16 aprile 1917

Firma dell'Immatricolato

IL RETTORE

BOLLI DEGLI ANNI SCOLASTICI

Image 3 Hassan Fekini's identity card, issued in 1917 by the University of Turin.



Image 4 Hussein Fekini, Mohamed's second-born son. At the age of 13, he joined one of his father's *mehallas* and took part in the attack upon Zuara. He died in combat in 1922, at age 20, during the violent battle of el-Uchim against the troops led by General Graziani.



Image 5 Tripoli, September 1919. This photograph and those that follow were taken by Italian photographers in the wake of the promulgation of the Libyan Statute, an act that marked the beginning of a period of peace, sadly a very brief period, between the two communities. The two individuals seated in the car are Mohamed Fekini and the Italian General Tarditi, who played a decisive role in the negotiations for the concession of the Libyan Statute. In the foreground is Ugo Niccoli, the secretary general of the Libyan government.



Image 6 Tripoli, February 1920. A group of Libyan notables visiting the airfield of Mellaha. At center, fifth from the right, is a young man, Ali Nouredine Fekini. To his right, Mahdi es-Sunni; on his left, Ali es-Shanta.



Image 7 Sidi Rahuma, June 19, 1929. Meeting between the governor of Libya, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, and the leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica, Omar al-Mukhtar (far left, with a white beard). After negotiations broke down, Badoglio ordered the execution of his adversary by hanging, on the false accusation that he had violated the truce agreements.

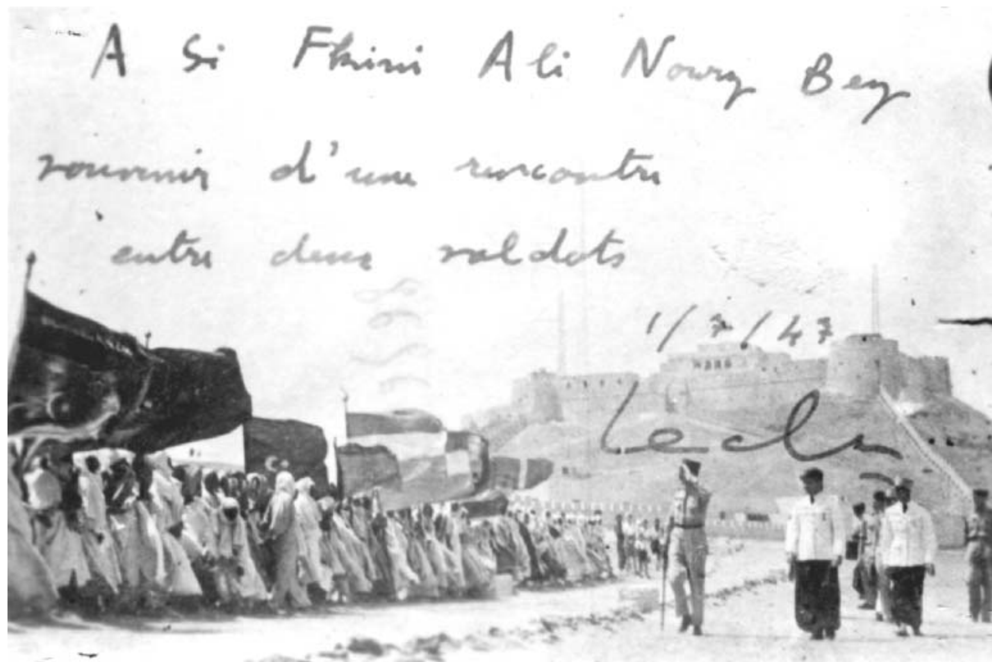


Image 8 A document demonstrating that, even in exile, Mohamed and his son Ali Nouredine collaborated with the French against the Axis powers. On this photograph of General Leclerc passing in review the French forces and the *mujahideen* of Ahmed Sef en-Nasser, beneath the walls of the *gahra* of Sebha, the conqueror of Kufra and Fezzan wrote a dedication: "To Si Fekini Ali Nouri Bey, in commemoration of a meeting between two soldiers."



Image 9 Kebili, 1941. Mohamed Fekini and his young son Mohieddine in their home in Kebili, in southern Tunisia, one of the many places where the Fekini family chose to live during their years in exile.



Image 10 Gabes, 1949. One of the last photographs of Mohamed Fekini. Next to him is his son Ali Nouredine, his right-hand man and political successor.

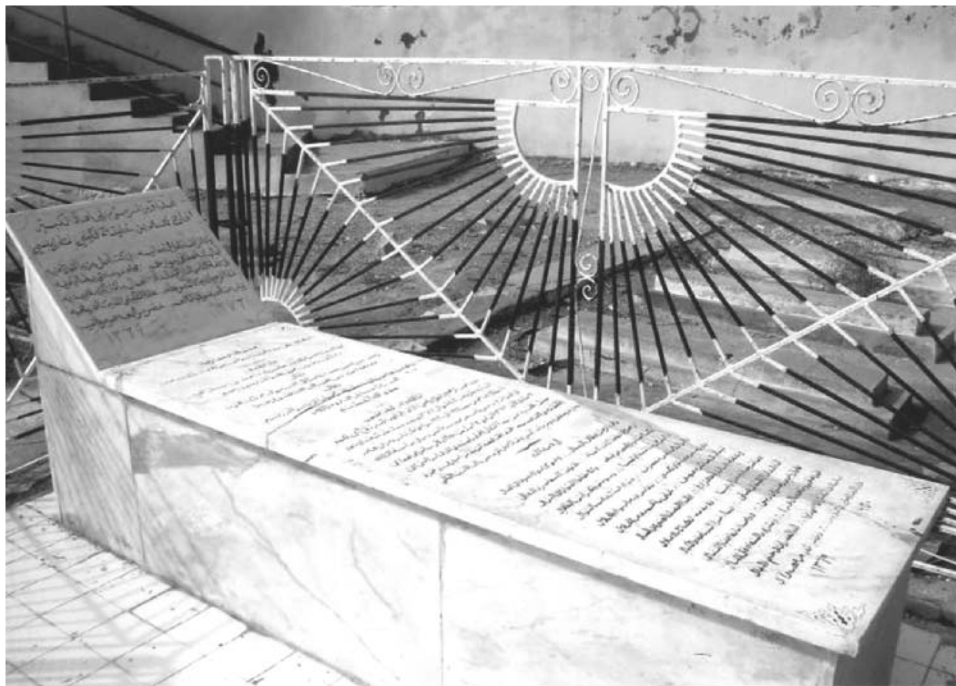


Image 11 Gabes. The grave of Mohamed Fekini. The marble slab is engraved with information about the life of the Libyan patriot and the poem that his son Ali Nouredine wrote for his father, beginning: “This leader whose beginnings shone like the sun, this Fekini whose past is as deep as the sea.”



Image 12 Ali Nouredine Fekini in the 1960s in Tunis, where he served as the ambassador of the Kingdom of Libya. He resigned his post after six years, no longer able to smooth over his disagreements with King Idris, who had surrounded himself with corrupt courtiers and flatterers.



Image 13 Le Caire, 1957. Mohieddine, appointed ambassador to Egypt by King Idris, presents his letters of accreditation to President Gamal Abdel Nasser.



Image 14 Tunis, 1963. Mohieddine Fekini, prime minister under King Idris, in conversation in Tunis with the Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, with whom he boasted long-standing ties of friendship.



Image 15 Algiers, 1963. The Libyan Prime Minister Mohieddine Fekini on a state visit to Algeria, shaking hands with Ahmed Ben Bella, the first president of an independent Algeria.



Image 16 Washington, 1963. Mohieddine Fekini, prime minister of Libya, meeting with American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a few weeks before Kennedy's assassination in Dallas.

9

A State within the State

1. The continual dithering of the government of Tripoli and the failure to implement the Libyan Statute had in the meanwhile persuaded the chiefs of Tripolitana—both those in the coalition of Ahmed el-Mraied and those of the Misratah area, now deprived of Ramadan al-Shitawi—that it was[1] absolutely necessary to overcome intertribal squabbling and find unity and harmony in a general resistance movement against the Italians, in order to exert strong pressure upon the Tripoli government and the central government in Rome, so as finally to obtain what had been agreed upon at Khalled ez-Zeitun and, perhaps, even some further advantages.

The conference for reconciliation and the refoundation of the Central Reform Committee was held in the Jebel Garian, between October and November of 1920. Among those participating were nearly all the most influential notables and military leaders, including those who lived in the Italian-occupied zones. Those who lived in occupied areas had received permission to attend from Governor Mercatelli. The conference culminated in the appointment of a commission, the so-called Garian Commission, which had been assigned the task of beginning negotiations, not with the government of Tripoli but directly with the Italian government in Rome. Basically, the delegates were assigned to submit two significant requests to the Italian authorities: (1) a substantial revision of the Statute that had been conceded in 1919 but had not yet been implemented; and (2) the establishment of an independent government of Tripolitania, ruled by an emir, under an Italian protectorate. These were, in other words, the same requests made by Ramadan al-Shitawi and by Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam in 1919 and rejected by Italy.

It was not until April 1921 that the Garian Commission was able to meet with the Minister for Colonies Luigi Rossi. The meeting had been postponed repeatedly because the government in Rome demanded that all 200 of the Italian soldiers being held prisoner in Misratah be released. But even after they had been liberated, negotiations moved forward at a crawl and, after several weeks, were derailed entirely. At the end of May, the Garian Commission left Rome, and only a few observers remained behind. The delegates returned home filled with disappointment and resentment. It should also be mentioned, as Mohamed Fekini points out, that Governor Mercatelli had in the meantime made a countermove by sending to Rome, in agreement with Suleiman el-Baruni, a second delegation led by Hassan Bacha and Yusuf Cherbisc, who were putting forth proposals that were much more reasonable and acceptable than those that had been advanced by the Garian Commission; the end purpose of this move had been to derail all negotiations.[2]

On the western Jebel, in the meanwhile, fighting had resumed, despite the decision made at the Garian Conference to halt the shedding of all Muslim blood. Once again, on November 6, 1920, Mohamed Fekini spoke to Governor Mercatelli, reminding him of the terrible events of September, the destruction of Arab villages, the exodus of the population toward Gefara or into the desert:

> If there is such a thing as justice, it is necessary that the government should pay for all the losses in human lives, possessions, and money, and that it should arrest the guilty parties and try them in a court of law. Unfortunately, el-Baruni is still on the loose, and he is carrying on his maneuvering and his lies, harming the Arabs and helping only his Ibadite followers. Colonel Mezzetti, too, is still there in the western region. And both of them continue to support and aid Khalifa ben Askar in Fassatu.... As for me, I continue to feel a sense of guilt toward my family, my relatives, my friends, and even my region because, on my account, they have lost everything, and that is because I have misled them about the position of the government, about justice and the laws. They are like men wandering naked through the desert, homeless, obliged to give up their homes to Khalifa ben Askar and his followers from Fassatu. We shall remain in the desert until Allah decides otherwise.[3]

In this letter, Fekini expressed his great sense of anguish and his disappointment over the maneuvers of the Ibadites with the support of the government of Tripoli. Mercatelli replied to this letter on

November 23, reiterating his absolute impartiality toward Arabs and Berbers and inviting Mohamed Fekini "to give up his wrath and thirst for revenge."[4] But it was impossible for him to follow this advice when Suleiman el-Baruni, who had reappeared once again on the Jebel, had begun to sow further discord, as we can clearly see from the letters (intercepted) that he sent to the notables of Kicla between January and April of 1921. Passing himself off as the savior of the Jebel and the staunch defender of the Fundamental Law, he was in reality fomenting unrest against Mohamed Fekini and, in a clear contradiction, inciting the population to break off relations with the Italians.[5]

Irritated and concerned over Suleiman el-Baruni's maneuvering, ten notables and sheiks from the Rojeban tribe sent a letter of protest to Governor Mercatelli and the members of the Governing Council; in it they wrote, among other things:

> All citizens were free and independent after the application of the Fundamental Law, which ensured justice for all parties and all regions. Unfortunately, however, all that changed with the arrival of el-Baruni in our region of the Jebel. He began by misleading the more naïve individuals among the Ibadites, with the claim that he represented the government and that he alone issued orders. . . . To begin with, he urged the Ibadites to unite and encouraged them to communicate among themselves, to organize, arm themselves, and to revolt. . . . If what he claims to be true really is, and he actually has all the powers of which he speaks, then all the Arabs in the Jebel ought to emigrate. We would prefer to abandon our lands and even die rather than accept the authority of el-Baruni and his people.[6]

While Mercatelli responded with a long deplorable silence to the protests and the appeals of the Rojeban notables, Suleiman el-Baruni and Khalifa ben Askar were concentrating their troops at Gasr Yafran and Fassatu, again with the support of the government in Tripoli. Concerning this unabashed operation to divide the people of Tripolitania and to unleash new intertribal warfare, Colonel Mezzetti was fairly straightforward: "Although the situation on the Jebel was becoming increasingly chaotic, it remained for a considerable period reasonably favorable to us, in part because Mercatelli had sent Suleiman el-Baruni there with responsibility for coordinating and commanding the forces that were fighting on our side."[7]

There was more, however. Between Mezzetti and Suleiman, there was also an understanding that once the Berber forces were ready to

take action, the colonel would openly come out in support of them. In early May 1921, as Mezzetti writes,

> once I arrived at Bir el-Ghnem, I sent as agreed to Suleiman el-Baruni the report that I was ready to move up onto the Jebel. He replied that the chieftains were assembling and that they would require a further four or five days. Knowing full well how slow they are to make decisions, I had foreseen a delay of three or four days; but it was necessary for me to remain at Bir el-Ghnem at least seven or eight days, and this was not possible. And so I was obliged to give up the plan entirely. How many times, afterward, did Suleiman el-Baruni express his bitter regret at having been unable to act with greater promptness! How much unhappiness and pain his fellow Muslims, and perhaps, the colony as a whole, would have been spared![8]

2. Unrivaled in his ability to generate conflict and discord, unbeatable in the wholesaling of lies, certain that his future would bring him power as the emir of all the Ibadites, Libyans, and Tunisians, Suleiman el-Baruni actually had none of the qualities of a great military strategist. Not only had he failed to bring about the attack against the Jebel Arabs, in coordination with Mezzetti, but when he finally did decide to act, he was resoundingly defeated by Mohamed Fekini at Belgraf, on April 21, 1921, and again, two days later. Entrenching his troops at Gasr Yafran with Khalifa ben Askar, he was defeated again at the beginning of July.[9] Immediately following the conquest of Gasr Yafran, Fekini was praised by the Central Reform Committee, which informed him that it had sent him substantial reinforcements under the command of Abdalla Temsichet.[10] Before long, Fekini, who was now joined by Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi and his men, completed the occupation of the western Jebel, with the exception of Fassatu,[11] which continued to receive aid from Zuara. In order to succeed in taking Fassatu as well, Mohamed Fekini asked his allies, especially Ahmed el-Mraied, to send heavy cannons as quickly as possible.[12]

On August 3, 1921, Fekini received a telegram from Tripoli containing news of considerable interest. It was signed by Othman el-Ghizani, president of the Nationalist Reform Party, announcing that Mercatelli had been replaced by the Italian businessman Giuseppe Volpi, one of the negotiators of the peace treaty of Ouchy. He also informed him that Colonel Mezzetti, el-Baruni's ally, had likewise been called back to Italy. Did this mean a significant shift? In effect, in the wake of the failures of—first, military men and later government

bureaucrats—an attempt was now being made with a businessman to see if it was possible to implement in Tripolitania a policy of "economic attraction," capable of bringing into the Italian orbit, on the strength of financial self-interest, the dissident and neutral chieftains.

During the same days that the guard was changing in Tripoli, the Central Reform Committee sent a delegation to the Jebel in an attempt to bring an end to the fighting and restore peace. A tribal pact of reconciliation was in fact signed on August 7 in the town of Chimak Addahir Arrainah.[13] "While they were still surrounded," Mohamed Fekini recalls, "our enemies received from Suleiman el-Baruni and Khalifa ben Askar weapons and ammunition so that they could go on fighting, but they refused to take delivery of the materiel, rejecting any further influence from this pair of opportunistic liars."[14] It should be pointed out, nonetheless, the reconciliation concerned only a few Arab Kabyles who had joined forces with the Ibadites and not those under the direct command of Suleiman el-Baruni and Khalifa ben Askar, who continued to control Fassatu and Nalut.

After he arrived in the colony on August 3, 1921, the new governor devoted several weeks to studying "with painstaking dedication all the political and military precedents of the ten years of occupation."[15] In his deliberate study of this country, he paid special attention to the military situation, both on the Italian side and on the side of the Arab dissidents. By August 27, he was already capable of writing a letter to Mohamed Fekini that read as follows:

> I am aware of the events that have occurred and of the efforts you have made in the past on behalf—and for the benefit—of your people, at a time when this country was rife with disorder and instability. If we enjoy security and prosperity nowadays, it is thanks to you. For this reason, I am counting heavily on your assistance, the help of your friend Ali es-Shanta, and on that of the Jebel chieftains, so that we may, together, restore the country to a state of permanent security in keeping with the laws and the demands of justice.... We must work with dedication and sincerity to apply as soon as possible the Fundamental Law.[16]

This letter to Fekini was not the only one that Governor Volpi sent to the chieftains of Tripolitania. He had also received visits from a great many of them at Tripoli Castle, including the most fervent nationalists and members of the Central Reform Committee. Unlike his predecessors, who preferred to engage in the politics of treachery and hybrid alliances, Volpi intended to put into operation immediately

a general policy of clarification meant to demolish the misunderstandings and resentments that had developed over recent years. As a concrete and competent businessman, he preferred to show his cards, as he stated in a telegram dated August 8 to the Minister for Colonies Girardini:

> The government's directives, confirmed so clearly by Your Excellency and accepted faithfully by myself, because I wholly subscribe to their underlying wisdom, must be limited to the firm defense of our occupations, which I shall complete at the earliest possible date, in accordance with the understandings established, and I shall refrain entirely from this dangerous game of creating and attempting to destroy alternately chiefs on the interior and camarillas of interests that are a threat to the colony's future existence, and whose success or failure only puts our national dignity to a grueling test.[17]

On August 20, 1921, Volpi was ready to announce his program, which, to start with, called for the complete implementation of the Fundamental Law. As Raffaele Rapex, a member of Volpi's cabinet reports, the governor thought that the first step to be taken was the "implementation of the legislative provisions that would lead to the immediate convocation of the Libyan parliament and the constitution of that legal representation that, over and above all the committees that might be arbitrarily established, would legitimately speak in the name of the Tripolitanian population."[18]

In the first three months of his governorship, Volpi adopted a series of significant measures, such as reopening the coastal markets to all Libyans; a new customs tariff that was more favorable to exports; the simplificiation of tax regulations; the abolition of special courts of law for natives, thus consecrating the principle of equality before the law proclaimed by the Fundamental Law; the establishment of an independent superior court of shari'a law; the establishment of a judiciary councillorship with a deliberative vote; and absolute equality of treatment among the various ethnic components of the colony (metropolitans and natives, Muslims and Jews). On the occasion of a state visit to Tripolitania by Prince Humbert of Savoy, finally, Volpi and the minister for colonies issued a blanket amnesty for all crimes of a political nature.[19]

Volpi's approach, then, certainly constituted a good beginning. In fact, his entire array of initiatives met with "not a single criticism" from the entire field of Libyan nationalists.[20] Nonetheless, there were a few basic realities, tied up with the behavior of the Central Reform

Committee, that Volpi was unable to accept: they had to do with the attribution of sovereign powers, such as the organization of a regular army and a police force; the creation of checkpoints a few hundred meters from the Italian defensive lines; the issuance of laws; the administration of justice; the organization in Misratah Marina of Libyan port and customs services; and even the collection of taxes. "To pretend to overlook this humiliating state of affairs," Raffaele Rapex observed, "was tantamount to renouncing the right of sovereignty and acknowledging that the rebels had formed an independent state."[21]

The confirmation that by this point, the Central Reform Committee was operating as a state within the state, came for Volpi on September 15 when 19 inland chieftains met with Humbert of Savoy in a hall in the castle. Courteous in form but quite tough in substance, the speech delivered to the 17-year-old prince by one of the chieftains stated, among other things: "The Arabs of Tripolitania, Your Highness, are deeply wounded by the opinion that the colonialists hold of them; they view us as secondary entities, even though the glory and civilization of the Arabs are not unknown to Your Highness. The Arabs, however, hope that Your visit may do something to heal these bloody wounds and free us from the shadows of vanity." After emphasizing that the country was suffering from an unassuaged thirst for education and the failure to acknowledge fundamental rights, the speech ended with this wish: "May we attain a period of brotherhood and cooperation, a time in which the Arabs are confident of their own future and when the Italian government, with the assurances of the Arabs themselves, can complete its mission of bringing us prosperity."[22]

Volpi judged this speech very harshly; in his opinion, it expressed "in an ambiguous form a less-than-credible loyalty, and intolerable aspirations to a supposed collaboration, which would have spelled our renunciation of any real dominion."[23] Although he was determined to maintain the promises implicit in the statute of 1919, Volpi failed to recognize the many errors committed by the Italian authorities of the previous decade and the repeated failures to comply on the part of the colonial administration, which was not to mention the acts of violence and theft and the reckless and disproportionate use of the gallows and of deportation. In rejecting the demands of the Tripolitanian population, which he judged to be "intolerable aspirations," Volpi saw no path open to him save that of restoring in the country the "real dominion" of Italy. He would begin this process,

a few months later, by reoccupying Misratah Marina—an initiative that would demolish all of his initial and promising measures.

3. Two episodes that occurred toward the end of the year would only encourage him in believing that he had made the right decision: Mohamed Fekini's final offensive against the Berbers of the western Jebel and the meeting in Sirte among the dissident leaders of Tripolitania and members of the brotherhood.

It was obvious that Mohamed Fekini, after the capture of Gasr Yafran (July 8, 1921) intended to continue his war against the Berbers. In fact, Raffaele Rapex writes:

> Implacable in his desire to avenge the death of his son Hassan, assisted by his loyal friend Ali es-Shanta and the ambitious Sheik Mohammed Sof, he waited for the right moment to carry on the temporarily suspended battle against the Berbers. His plan was aided by the behavior of Suleiman el-Baruni and the principal Berber chieftains who, as soon as they saw that the situation was becoming dangerous, abandoned their supporters, on the pretext that they needed to go to Tripoli to request new and stronger reinforcements. On the Jebel, no one was left to guide the Berber struggle save only Khalifa ben Askar, an impulsive and extravagant man—who was therefore ill suited as a commander.[24]

Continually informed by his friend Othman el-Ghizani concerning the various moves of Suleiman el-Baruni in Tripoli, and now having learned that he had lost all credibility in the capital following the departure of Colonel Mezzetti, to such a degree "that he barricaded himself in his home and emerged only by night,"[25] Mohamed Fekini gradually became certain that the Berbers would no longer receive government aid. As el-Ghizani put it, "the new governor is committed to studying the situation in the country without listening to the advice of the most partisan and untrustworthy individuals. He has ignored the demands and protests of the Ibadites concerning the livestock that they claim is in the hands of the Zintan and Rojeban."[26]

This was the moment to act. On the night of October 6, 1921 the soldiers of Mohamed Fekini and Ahmed es-Sunni launched a surprise attack on the Berber section of the village of Er Rehibat and occupied it entirely, plundering it as they did so. The first house attacked was that of the *mudir* Mohammed al-Chin, who was indicated by rumor as the killer of Hassan Fekini, with the complicity of his son in that killing. Both men were killed during a "very fierce" battle.[27]

After a halt lasting several weeks, reinforced by regular troops under the command of Abdalla Temsichet and Abdelati Germa, Mohamed Fekini resumed the offensive, occupying Jadu, Fassatu, Cabao, and Nalut after defeating Khalifa ben Askar at Tamzin. Between November and December, the mountain Berbers—more than 15,000 in number—were expelled from all of the western Jebel, from Gasr Yafran to the Tunisian border. And once again they took refuge in coastal zones under Italian occupation, between Zuara, el-Uotia, and Al Ajaylat.[28]

As Raffaele Rapex writes, "Governor Volpi believed, from the very first days of his government, that it would be wise to mend fences with Mohamed Fekini who, in turn, never tired of insisting that his fight was only with the Berber chieftains who had offended him, and with Suleiman el-Baruni who egged them against him, but that his sentiments of obedience and loyalty to the government remained unchanged." And because Volpi knew perfectly well that the Berbers "would be unable to put up an extended resistance," he decided to establish "at the earliest possible time relations with Mohamed Fekini, before he could become lord of the Jebel and assume that the government was reaching out to him in fear of his new power."[29]

Volpi assigned Lieutenant Antonio Sbriscia, a member of his cabinet who had had close and cordial ties with Fekini when Fekini was a member of the Governing Council, to establish contact with the Arab leader. On December 18, in fact, Sbriscia wrote Fekini to inform him that the governor was very happy with how Fekini had treated the population after the cessation of combat. And he added: "We are counting heavily on you and we are ready to meet your demands. The governor has told me that I alone should contact you."[30] A few days later, he wrote him again to deny the charge that the government had provided the Berbers of the Jebel military aid of any sort: "I assure you that since the arrival of the present governor, the government has provided no aid at all to the population of the Jebel, except in cases of humanitarian aid to preserve them from hunger and cold. If there have been any other types of aid to Zuara, the governor stands ready to open an immediate investigation and to punish the guilty parties."[31] The resumption of ties beween the government and Mohamed Fekini—reported Rapex—"led to the need to establish a clear and specific attitude toward Suleiman el-Baruni who, although he is an Ottoman senator and citizen, was the mastermind behind all of the maneuvering that led to the regrettable situation in the Jebel, and whose presence in Tripolitania was in fact a menace to

the peace.... And Governor Volpi exiled him once and for all from Tripolitania on December 22, 1921, eliminating one major source of hatred and rancor among both Arabs and Berbers, who no longer saw him as anything more than a duplicitous Ottoman subject, incapable of managing the situations that he himself had created, in his insatiable ambition."[32]

On December 23, Volpi sent a telegram to the Minister for Colonies Girardini:

> "With the mail boat to Siracusa Suleiman el-Baruni left Libya yesterday evening. This notable is leaving Tripolitania followed by the unanimous detestation of Arabs and Berbers, who attribute to him great blame for the events of the Jebel, especially those of the last year. He is now humiliated and depressed, but his insatiable ambition and his fanaticism should certainly lead to new intrigues and new actions, invariably to our harm.... Let Your Excellency decide whether it is not advisable to keep an eye on him."[33]

For Mohamed Fekini, the fact that his great adversary was finally leaving Libya constituted a considerable moral and political victory. But it had taken ten years and several thousand deaths before the Italian authorities realized that Suleiman el-Baruni had been the "mastermind behind all the intrigues" and that he had drawn into his network of devious maneuvers both the government in Tripoli and the rebel chieftains, as well as the Ibadites. Nonetheless, credit should be given to Governor Volpi for having cut off the ambiguous ties with the Ottoman senator and finally definitively expelled him from the Libyan stage.

4. While Mohamed Fekini was bringing to a conclusion his offensive against the Berbers, Ahmed el-Mraied summoned a conference in Tarhuna with the participation of the leading chieftains of Tripolitania, the representatives of the Nationalist Party (Othman el-Ghizani, es-Sadegh ben el-Hag, Abdessalam el-Buseiri) and the Egyptian Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam. The conference was meant to prepare a ready response to the chronic Italian delays and the unsuccessful efforts that had been made in Rome by the delegation of the Central Reform Committee in order to obtain the complete implementation of the Statute. Among the various proposals put forth there, the one that received consensus was that of Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, which can be briefly summarized as follows: 1) preserve intact the military organization; 2) come to an agreement with the leaders of the

Sanusiya to establish a concrete form for the emirate; 3) refrain from committing acts of hostility against the government, but decisively oppose any invasions or incursions by Italian troops in the areas not yet garrisoned; and 4) immediate withdrawal of the delegation in Rome, which had already suffered excessive humiliations.

It was not a declaration of war, but it came close. When, on December 23, 1921, Lieutenant Colonel Ruggeri emerged with his troops from Fort Rossavalle to perform maneuvers in a non-garrisoned area, Ahmed el-Mraied immediately lodged a formal protest. In his letter to the government in Tripoli, we read, among other things:

> The military maneuvers outside of the fortified zones do nothing more than provoke the Tripolitanian populace, driving it into a warlike frenzy.... For the past year, the Tripolitanian people have been striving with every available peaceful means to affirm their just rights. In response to their demands, the government has offered little more than contempt and irony. Likewise, the delegates of this population have been obliged to suffer at length in Rome in order to set forth the aspirations of those whom they represent.... Let us declare openly that, should matters come to this pass, we shall report to the entire Libyan people the need to take warlike measures in order to defend their honor, even at the cost of life and limb, and to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to preserve their own liberty.[34]

It was in the midst of this atmosphere of open defiance that, in the middle of January 1922, a conference of the greatest importance got underway in the old Turkish castle in Sirte, midway between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica; the significance of this conference could hardly elude the attention of Governor Volpi. Not only had the Arab chieftains of Tripolitania found their unity under the leadership of Ahmed el-Mraied, but now that rivalries and fears had been subdued, they had once again extended the hand of friendship to their brothers in Cyrenaica, as they had during the Italo-Turkish war. In Sirte, a historic decision was made. The two *vilayets* of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica would now be led by a single emir, specifically, the Grand Senussi, Mohammed Idris el-Mahdi al-Senussi.[35] Since they had, in fact, been incapable of putting forth a candidate of their own, the Tripolitanian delegates offered the Grand Senussi, who had already been appointed emir of Cyrenaica by the Italians, the supreme position. This meant, most importantly, that the cornerstone of a unified Libyan state had been laid in Sirte. But the conference was also intended as a response to Rome, which had not yet implemented—except on paper—the

institutions of the Fundamental Law. "If it is a crime on the part of the citizens, in the eyes of the Minister for Colonies, to attempt for an entire year to negotiate with the government," Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam wrote in that period, "then let them ask forgiveness for this sin, and do without negotiations for another year."[36]

The conference in Sirte came to an end on January 21, 1922, with the formulation of a National Unity Pact, consisting of 12 articles, which lay the basis for an authentic sovereign state, endowed with a parliament and supported by two parties: the Central Reform Committee for Tripolitania and the Central National Governing Committee for Cyrenaica. According to article 8 of the Pact, "the two parties agree and commit themselves not to recognize any power on the part of the enemy that might bring harm to Muslims and to prevent that enemy from extending his power beyond the points that he already controls. In case of war, neither of the two parties is authorized to agree to a peace treaty or an extended truce on an individual basis." "If the enemy attacks one of the parties," reads article 9, "the other party must come to its aid, with materiel, money, and combatants."[37]

The challenge was clear, precise, and openly announced in a public document. Volpi accepted that challenge. And on January 18, 1922, for the first time since the signing of the agreement of Khallet ez-Zeitun, the Arabs opened fire on Italian detachments that emerged from the barbed wire enclosures of Khoms. When Ahmed el-Mraied lodged a protest, Volpi replied with some irony: "As if the harmless military exercises of our troops were provocations of some king, and as if the territory outside of our garrisons belonged to another state."[38] In response to Ahmed el-Mraied's protests and challenge, Volpi decided to reply with an unambiguous act of sovereignty, which would finally bring to an end a situation that he considered ambiguous, humiliating, and intolerable. His response took the form of the military occupation of Misratah Marina, a vital organizational center for the Arabs.

Volpi knew perfectly well that this move would trigger a resumption of the revolt, even though he had announced it with a letter to Ahmad al-Shitawi, chief of Misratah, describing it as a simple "restoration of the duties of the Royal Harbor Office." Still, what the governor chiefly wanted to achieve was to eliminate the atmosphere of ambiguity and make it clear to the Arabs that the time for lengthy conversations in tents was over, and that Italy was going to resume its rights in Tripolitania as an occupying power.

Once he had received approval from the central government, in complete secrecy Volpi readied his expeditionary force (some 2,000 men, 6 cannons, and 34 machine guns), and on January 26, 1922, he landed it on the beaches of Misratah Marina. Once the Arabs had recovered from their surprise, they unleashed repeated attacks, preventing the Italo-Eritrean forces from expanding their bridgehead. It was not until February 11, after the arrival of reinforcements and a series of terror bombardments on Misratah City, performed by airplanes and warships, that Colonel Pier Luigi Pizzari was able to order a general attack against the enemy lines; the defenders were forced to retreat to Zarrugh. In the fighting since January, the Arabs had lost 600 men. But the Italo-Eritrean forces had also suffered heavy losses: 139 dead, 328 wounded, and 3 missing in action. What was meant to be a simple police operation, in Giuseppe Volpi's plans, had not only encountered unexpected resistance but had suddenly unleashed fighting throughout Tripolitania, triggering alarm and concern in Italy, as well as a spirited protest in the Italian parliament by the Socialist deputies.[39]

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10

Rodolfo Graziani versus Mohamed Fekini

1. On January 23, 1922, three days prior to the landing of Italian troops at Misratah, Governor Volpi sent a letter to Mohamed Fekini informing him that he had received his list of demands and asking him "to do everything within his power to bring aid to the population and establish security among the region's tribes."[1] One week later, Lieutenant Sbriscia, assigned by Volpi to maintain relations with Fekini, wrote him a long letter to explain the reasons that had driven the governor to occupy Misratah Marina. In the second part of the letter, Sbriscia broached an especially thorny problem for Fekini:

> The establishment of peace between Sunnis and Ibadites so that the inhabitants of the Jebel can return to their homes following the misadventures that have befallen them. I know that you are an honest man, filled with humanity and generosity, and I therefore feel certain that you will forget the past and help to facilitate the return to their homes of these poor unfortunates who bear no responsibility for what has happened.[2]

It appears evident from these two letters that Volpi was working to secure the understanding or, at the very least, the neutrality of Mohamed Fekini, at a time of particular crisis, prompted by the violent occupation of Misratah. As Corrado Zoli writes, the government of Tripoli was experiencing "a moment of bewilderment"[3] and was therefore trying all possible means to bring an end to the fighting. Indeed, on February 14, Volpi authorized two known adversaries of the government—Othman el-Ghizani and the lawyer Giovanni Martini—[4]to travel to Misratah City to establish contact with the rebels and ask them what conditions they would accept in order to halt hostilities. "The response of the Committee of Garian," Zoli

recalled, "was the demand, pure and simple, for the independence of the entire colony and the establishment of the emirate for Tripolitania as well."[5]

The positions of the two opposing sides, then, were quite far apart, but negotiations went forward all the same, while a truce went into effect that was scheduled to last until April 10. Volpi therefore authorized new talks, to be held at Funduq esh-Sherif, but, as Mohamed Fekini recalls, he did not participate personally in those talks, nor did he send government or military functionaries to take part but only the businessman Luigi Belli and government interpreter Raffaele Rapex, precisely to signal how little importance he placed on the new conversations and to strip them of all official standing.

Among the participants in the four talks—on March 25, 28, and 30 and April 5—were, on the Arab side, all the most important chieftains: Ahmed el-Mraied, Mohamed Fekini, Bashir el-Saadawi, Omar Bu Dabbous, Ahmad al-Shitawi, Muktar Koobar, Mohammed es-Suei el-Keituni, Mohammed Farhat, and Othman el-Ghizani. According to the account of Raffaele Rapex, who left a detailed 30-page report, the tone of the conversations was almost invariably polite, even courteous, but the negotiations continued to move in circles, with no real progress. Rapex, in Volpi's name, asked first of all for the restoration of all civil services (freedom to work in the tuna fishing and packing operations, reactivation of railroad communications, resumption of the fertilization of palms in the oases) and a halt to isolated sniping on the Italian forts and insults against the Libyan ascars, frequently defamed as "pigs and traitors."

The Arab chieftains, in turn, objected that the government's policies "were not sincere, but based invariably upon force and imposed conditions"[6]; that the bureaucratic and judicial systems were in sore need of "radical change"[7]; that only with the concession of the emirate and with the withdrawal of Italian troops from Misratah Marina would it be possible to come to an agreement.[8] Rapex responded with a courteous but definitive and unappealable rejection to the Arab chieftains' criticisms and demands.

In response to the repeated demands for the emirate, Rapex shot back, April 5: "Your persistent reiteration of this demand means that you have made the stubborn decision to wage war, and if that is the case, then it is necessary to make it clear at this point that the responsibility for that decision rests entirely upon your shoulders."[9] On the evening of that same day, the Italian delegation returned to Tripoli. "As I was leaving," Rapex reported, "Mohammed Farhat asked me

whether I expected to have further occasion to return to Funduq esh-Sherif. I answered that he is too intelligent a man to think for a moment that such a possibility existed, because the Arab chieftains have entered a path that will never lead to an agreement."[10]

During the course of the discussions at Funduq esh-Sherif, Rapex attempted to find an opportunity to have a separate private conversation with Mohamed Fekini in order to extort his agreement to the return of the Berbers to the Jebel. And he added that, "in order to demonstrate his good intentions toward the government, he should withdraw and ensure that none of his soldiers remained at Zavia."[11] Rapex received his answer indirectly, from a servant of the chief of the Rojeban. He told Rapex that Mohamed Fekini had "no objections to the return of the Berber population of Nalut, Fassatu, and Yafran to their homes, but that he could not accept the return of Khalifa ben Askar, Musa Grada, and Salem Bershoush," who had committed too many bloody crimes against the Arab population.[12]

The truce during the "discussions" of Funduq esh-Sherif in any case was useful to both Volpi and Ahmed el-Mraied. Volpi needed for matters back in Italy to calm down, in the wake of the agitation that he himself had imprudently unleashed with the military operation of Misratah Marina. Ahmed el-Mraied, on the other hand, who was constantly receiving reports on affairs in Italy from his emissaries in Rome, felt certain that time would work to his advantage. Both men, in the meantime, worked busily to strengthen their war-making capabilities, evidently because each believed that after April 10, there would be no new truce but, instead, open combat. For this reason, as well, neither of the two was willing to give an inch on their respective positions. As late as April 1, as Volpi reports, Ahmed el-Mraied was still writing to the government in Tripoli to demand "the elimination and modification of all territorial, political, and administrative measures previously issued by us, conceding in only the vaguest of terms any Italian sovereignty. We responded to Mraied's letter by informing him that we were unable and unwilling even to receive it."[13]

2.

In Italy, meanwhile, in the wake of the fall of the government led by Prime Minister Ivanoe Bonomi, the reins of government, increasingly difficult to manage in the face of the rising Fascist tide, had been entrusted at the end of February 1922 to a secondary figure, Luigi Facta, while the ministry for colonies was headed by the pro-Nitti Giovanni Amendola, who replaced Girardini. The first telegraphic contacts between the new minister and Governor Volpi were

particularly harsh in tone, to such a degree that when Volpi traveled to Rome to meet with Amendola, he was determined to submit his resignation. Volpi, in fact, considered the new minister to be a pernicious radical, a hardline anticolonialist, and certainly the man least suited to carry forward the policy of strength that he had inaugurated with the reconquest of Misratah. From their very first meeting, however, the two men established an excellent relationship, which immediately took the form of a specific program for future actions.

Amendola took office as minister for colonies on February 26, 1922, and one month later, just as discussions were beginning at Funduq esh-Sherif between Volpi's two emissaries and the dissident Arab chieftains, Amendola addressed in the Italian parliament the Libyan problem in response to a formal inquiry from Senator Libertini. His speech was a model of clarity. It was clearly a programmatic statement, and it contained all the ideas to which Amendola would adhere in the eight months he served as minister for colonies. "Undoubtedly," Amendola began, "a number of worthy actions have been undertaken in Libya, and we should not devalue those actions with facile criticisms; and yet those actions have not followed a consistent line, indeed, they have often been contradictory and have canceled one another out. Their contradictory nature and the way in which they undercut one another has led to the unfortunate situation that has hindered our progress for some time now."

He then went on to discuss relations with the Libyan people and, in particular, the troubled relations with the dissident nationalist leaders. In this context, Amendola announced that he would not pose any objections to the implementation of the Libyan Statutes, even if that concession "was perhaps an element of idealistic naiveté in our own policies." Amendola thus pledged that he would not revoke the Statutes and also promised that he would deal with the dissident chieftains in an honest and straightforward manner rather than arming and pitting them one against the other. On this point, he was quite categorical: "It will be impossible to establish any order in Libya as long as chieftains and leaders persist in their rivalries; even though, at certain points, perhaps, it was thought—due to a misunderstanding of how things really stand—that those rivalries might produce useful results for us."

Amendola was thus renouncing the policy of intrigue and misunderstandings and declared that he was "willing to learn the thoughts and feelings of the Libyan people," but only on the condition that the dissident leaders would give up their persistent demand that they be

allowed to negotiate with the Italian authorities as an equal power. "We ardently wish for peace," he went on. "But it will be impossible to achieve that peace if the Libyan people do not desire it as much as we do; and if they wish for peace, they must give us tangible evidence of this desire." If, instead, the dissident leaders of the interior had other plans in mind "for the implementation of extremist designs of pan-Islamic revanchism" and meant to go on stirring up trouble in their country, "then it would have to be made perfectly clear that there was no possibility of agreement."[14]

Amendola's speech was meant in particular for the Tripolitanian leaders who were assembled at Funduq esh-Sherif for their negotiations with Rapex and Belli. But the message, balanced and reasonable, though it might have been, reached its recipients far too late. It came, in the wake of three years of postponements, false promises, and intrigue. The Arab chieftains had finally and completely abandoned all trust in the Italian authorities and, as a result, could no longer see any alternatives to the armed struggle as a way of attaining their rights. The message came too late as well because the demands of the Tripolitanian leaders were no longer the demands of 1919. In 1919, they would have been satisfied with the liberties provided for in the Statutes, whereas now, as we learned from the negotiations at Funduq esh-Sherif, independence and the emirate appeared to be two fundamental and nonnegotiable demands. Therefore, Amendola's message was destined to remain a moot point.

On April 10, 1922, the truce to which Volpi and Ahmed el-Mraied had agreed to expired, and neither of the two parties lifted a finger to extend it. The Arabs were the first to break it. On April 14, they attacked in overwhelming numbers the Italian garrison defending the railroad station of Ras el-Amhar, outside Zavia, laying siege to it for an entire day. Commanding the operation was the former deputy Mohammed Farhat,[15] who had been, until just a few weeks before, the head of the Garian Commission in Rome. Precisely because of the presence at Ras el-Amhar of a statesman with the stature of Farhat Bey, the violation of the truce took on a meaning that far outweighed the scale of the modest military engagement. In reality, this was a clear and unequivocal answer to Amendola; and the break, therefore, was not merely with Tripoli but specifically with Rome.

Volpi's reaction to the attack at Ras el-Amhar was immediate. Between April 14 and 25, two columns of soldiers, under the command of Colonels Couture and Graziani, attacked the region of Zavia, which was still under the control of the rebels, and freed the

garrison of Ras el-Amhar from its attackers, driving the Arabs out of the oases of Gargusa, et-Tuebia, and Zavia and restoring communications between Tripoli and Zuara. A band of Ibadites under the command of Yusuf Cherbisc also took part in the operation. Once again, then, despite Amendola's promises, the Italians had resumed the age-old and misguided practice of arming the Berbers against the Arabs.

During the round-up operation of the area to the south of the railroad, Colonels Couture and Graziani "executed anyone who dared to oppose resistance,"[16] in keeping with a tactic that would be used for a full decade to come. Raffaele Rapex offered the following commentary on the operations: "Thus, in eleven days, the foolish undertaking of Mohammed Farhat, upon which the rebel leaders had constructed so many illusions, collapsed in miserable failure. The entire coastal region, from Tripoli to Zuara, over a distance of 120 kilometers (75 miles), covered and patrolled by our troops, returned to a state of order and tranquillity."[17]

Fearing, therefore, a decisive attack against el-Azizia, which had been under rebel siege for two months and was being resupplied with provisions and ammunition from the air, Volpi ordered the liberation of the garrison against the advice of Marshal Badoglio, who had arrived in the Libyan colony on April 26 "in order to verify the likelihood of success for Governor Volpi's resumption of the offensive."[18] Lifting the siege of el-Azizia involved some 9,000 men, broken down into 6 mobile groups and equipped with 14 cannons. "This was the first time," recalled Colonel Guglielmo Nasi, "since the retreat of 1915, that our troops were marching southward once again."[19]

After leaving Tripoli, Zanzur, Mesciasta, and Funduq et-Tugar on April 25, the columns converged on Suani Ben Adem, advancing over an eight-to-ten kilometer (five-to-six mile) front. On April 29, they reached their objective and soundly defeated the rebel forces commanded by Ahmed el-Mraied himself. On April 30, whipped by the fury of a sand storm that raised the temperature to 55 degrees Celsius (130 degrees Fahrenheit), Graziani's column resumed its march, reached el-Azizia, and lifted the siege. In the days that followed, the six mobile groups patrolled the Gefara of el-Azizia, repeatedly beating the Arab *mehallas* and driving them back into the Jebel. In just 20 days' time, they had reconquered a vast territory, inflicting heavy losses on the rebels.[20]

The reasons for the success of this operation were explained by one of the leading figures in this campaign of reconquest, the very young Colonel Graziani. When Graziani landed in the Libyan colony, he

had already decided "that he would be second to no one."[21] Indeed, as soon as the fighting began, Graziani stood out as the most daring, decisive, and ruthless of all the young colonels. "The Arabs understood that they were dealing with a new kind of enemy," Graziani claimed, "who had a new soul, forged in the great victory on the European front, an enemy who employed new methods; an enemy who no longer halted at the first reports of gunfire, who was unconcerned by elevated temperatures and inclement weather, who gave no advance signals of his intentions, and who attacked rapidly, impetuously, against flank, rear, and front, without quarter or mercy."[22]

3. Once the plains had been cleared of Arab *mehallas*, the Tripoli government moved into the second phase of the operation, which called for the return of the Berbers to Jebel Nefusa and Fassatu. The operation involved the mobile groups commanded by Graziani, Pizzari, Gallina, and Belly as well as the Berber Auxiliary Band under Yusuf Cherbisc. On May 29, before ordering the commencement of operations, Rodolfo Graziani sent a letter from Zuara to Mohamed Fekini, who was familiar with his fearsome opponent. "We herewith inform you," the letter read, "that the governor has issued a warrant for the arrest of Khalifa ben Askar as well as relieving him from the office of *kaymakam* of Nalut…The order for ben Askar's arrest is the result of his persistence in error and his obstinate determination to continue waging war in the Jebel, while the government asked him nothing more than the peaceful return of the Ibadites to their hometowns and not a war which has caused such harm to his men." Following this preamble, in which he honestly acknowledged ben Askar's errors and violence against the the Arabs, Graziani suddenly changed tone: "We will do nothing to you if you and your men refrain from attacking the Ibadites or my soldiers, but if we hear a single gunshot from you, we will be obliged to respond with terrifying weapons, and you alone will be responsible before God for the blood that will be shed."[23]

Between May 29 and June 10, while combat was already raging on the Jebel, and defeats were alternating with victories, Graziani sent Mohamed Fekini six more letters in which, with his rough-hewn soldierly style, he mixed threats with blandishments and respectful terms of address with scornful and demeaning language. Fekini's replies, in contrast, are surprising in their concreteness, the specific denunciations of intrigue, the fairness of his demands, and the sober and self-contained style. The first response is dated June 3, an especially sad and yet exhilarating day for Fekini. In fact, he had succeeded in

halting Graziani at the wells of el-Uchim, killing two Italian officers and about a hundred irregular troops from the Cherbisc Band. And yet, in the fighting, Mohamed Fekini also lost a second son, Hussein, just 20 years old, a young man who, as the reader will recall, had already taken part, at the tender age of 13, in the combat around Zuara.

A few hours before the battle of el-Uchim began, Mohamed Fekini dictated his answer to Graziani's first letter to one of his secretaries.[24] In the first section of his reply, he recapitulated the history of the disagreements between Arabs and Berbers and denounced the government's continuous support of the Ibadites. As for the arrest of Khalifa ben Askar, Fekini commented:

> We believe that Khalifa is, all things considered, the least dangerous of the Berbers of Fassatu. The true authors of the degradation and corruption in the *vilayet* are Yusuf Cherbisc and el-Baruni. Yesterday, immediately after we received your letter, part of your army moved against us in an attack, but we reject this method of repatriating the Ibadites by force. If you want peace, you must first of all take them to Zuara and then discuss with us the possibility of a general truce. If you continue to insist on repatriating the Ibadites by force, then we shall defend our religion, our homeland, and our honor to the very last drop of blood.[25]

The battle of el-Uchim, Raffaele Rapex observed, "stripped Colonel Graziani of any illusions he might have had that the march on Josh could be completed without fighting, and gave him a sense of the power and combative nature of his enemy."[26] In order to gain time, and while waiting for Volpi to send him the Sixth Libyan Battalion as reinforcement, Graziani continued to send letters to Mohamed Fekini in which he tried to convince him that it was in his own interest to favor the repatriation of the Berbers. Concerning the battle at the wells of el-Uchim, he wrote: "I invite you to consider the tragedies that war causes and the blood that is shed in war. We have learned of the death of your nephew, but you alone are responsible for that death.[27] We are saddened to see that God has punished you and will continue to punish you."[28]

Graziani used the quickest method available to correspond with Fekini, by dropping letters out of planes. But on June 6, along with his letter, he ordered that a number of bombs be dropped as well on the house of the Arab leader, provoking Fekini's righteous indignation; he replied: "We consider your method of corresponding by bombers

as a provocation unworthy of a civilized state and an illustrious individual. We, in contrast, are true men, accustomed to war, men who prefer an honest death to a life of humiliation. . . . If you want peace, arrange to repatriate the Ibadites to their homes in Zuara and then we can discuss the possibility of reconciliation. If you wish to begin negotiations with us, send us the interpreter Rapex and Lieutenant Sbriscia. We will guarantee their safety."[29]

The following day, Graziani sent Fekini another letter, this time without the accompaniment of bombs, containing only the invitation to reflect carefully in order to ward off further destruction and death.[30] This was, once again, nothing more than a clumsy expedient designed to gain time, because the Sixth Libyan Battalion was late in arriving and Fekini had 2,500 combatants, that is to say, forces that outnumbered Graziani's.[31] While still waiting for reinforcements, Graziani sent a new letter to Fekini on June 8 to remind him that he could inflict terrible losses upon his army if he should dare to seek an engagement.[32] On the same day, June 8, Mohamed Fekini replied, asking for a general truce and requesting a personal meeting with Graziani: "In conclusion, we hope for peace, but only on the condition that we can be rid of the arrogant abuse of the Ibadites, of their stubbornness, and the aid that you Italians continue to provide them."[33]

Despite the fact that the Ghibli howled in an unprecedented manner between June 4 and 11, impeding all war making, Mohamed Fekini, with the assistance of Ahmed es-Sunni, continued to harass the enemy with "skirmishes and raids."[34] As Graziani recalls in his memoirs, Fekini went so far as to deploy his *mehallas* outside the Italian camp of Suani el-Kurdi. Graziani replied by sending his bomber planes to attack the Arab positions, and in a letter dated June 10, he impudently made the following statement: "I have not had the honor of making your personal acquaintance, but you should know that I am impartial with respect to your interests, as well as those of the Ibadites. I act only to serve the interests of my own government."[35]

At this point in their epistolary relationship, Mohamed Fekini, revealing an extraordinary patience and wisdom, summarized for Graziani the events of the previous decade that involved the Ibadites. He emphasized that it had in fact been the Tripoli government that had sent his son Hassan to the Jebel to suppress the revolt of Khalifa ben Askar. And it had been Suleiman el-Baruni and Khalifa ben Askar who started the wars on the Jebel, and, in fact, the former had been expelled from Tripolitania at the behest of Governor Volpi, while the

latter had been executed by the Italians for high treason. Graziani, however, appeared to have completely forgotten these episodes and was busily making the same mistakes as Menzinger and Mercatelli by rearming the Berbers. "I am neither a head of state nor the supreme leader of the Jebel," Fekini went on. "What I wish above all other things is to serve the interests of my homeland. You, on the other hand, have committed an enormous error by enlisting the bands of Yusuf Cherbisc among your troops." And he ended the letter with the following words: "We desire peace. But I have absolutely no fear of your airplanes and I take full responsibility for my actions. None of us will live forever."[36]

The arrival at Suani el-Kurdi of the Sixth Libyan Battalion, on June 11, interrupted the exchange of correspondence between the two men. The following morning, after the Ghibli died down, Graziani ordered his troops into movement with the objective of occupying el-Josh, but as they moved forward, they were insistently attacked by Fekini's *mehallas*, despite the relentless activity of the aircraft that, as Graziani put its, "sowed terror and death in the enemy ranks."[37] Defeated a first time before the oasis of el-Josh, on June 12, Mohamed Fekini's *mujahideen* retreated to Jadu and attempted to hold the attacking forces at the pass of As Salamat. But they were defeated a second time, on June 18, allowing Graziani to reoccupy Jadu, Cabao, and Nalut.

Mohamed Fekini devotes a number of pages in his memoirs to the fighting that took place between June 3 and 18. And his version of events coincides perfectly with Graziani's and Rapex's accounts. He described his successes and did nothing to conceal his defeats. After the furious battle at the pass of As Salamat, he writes, for instance: "Following this battle, the Muslims discovered that they were unable to hold out, because they lacked weapons, ammunition, and men. Moreover, no reinforcements arrived from the west."[38] Beaten twice,[39] Mohamed Fekini withdrew with his soldiers and their families into the desert of el-Abiar and the area around Mizda. Graziani believed that he had beaten him once and for all, but he was mistaken. He would have to deal with him as a terrible and punishing adversary for eight more years.

4. The summer of 1922, in Tripolitania, passed in relative tranquility. There were certainly raids, both in the Gefara and in the Jebel, against Italian outposts, but they did not trigger any major clashes. In any case, they kept a steady sense of apprehension among the Italian

forces and testified to the virulence of the rebel resistance. Still, Governor Volpi, following the successes achieved by Graziani, was determined to eliminate all resistance. After a visit to Tripoli from the Minister for Colonies Amendola, Volpi prepared a general offensive that was designed to bring about the reconquest of the entire Jebel, from Beni Ulid to the Tunisian frontier. While waiting to send his columns of soldiers to the attack, he prepared the various legal tools that would allow him to operate. On July 17, 1922, he signed the decree that established a state of siege and the entry into operation of the Military Penal Code throughout the territory of Tripolitania. With the same decree, he created in Zavia a Special Military Tribunal, which was authorized to hand down death sentences according to local custom, that is, by hanging.

On October 28, as Fascist columns were marching on Rome back in Italy, and Victor Emmanuel III refused to sign the decree law instituting a state of siege, Colonel Graziani marched from Jadu with 4,000 rifles, 300 horsemen, and 4 artillery pieces, with the objective of taking control of the Jebel of Gasr Yafran. On October 30, Graziani's column reached the town of Auenia-Rumia and joined up with the auxiliary group commanded by the Berber Yusuf Cherbisc and the irregular formations of Misciascia and Riaina. The following day, Graziani resumed his advance, clashing with the *mujahideen* of Mohamed Fekini and Ahmed es-Sunni at Umm el-Garsan and at Suffit, defeating them soundly both times in "frightful battles"[40] and capturing "a vast number of animals, two cannons, numerous machine guns, a great number of rifles, and all of the stockpiles." According to Rapex, the rebels left 230 dead on the field of battle.[41] On that same day, the Graziani column was occupying Gasr Yafran and joined up with the Pizzari group, which was arriving from el-Azizia.

"As fate would have it," Graziani recalls, "we were fighting around the age-old mausoleum of Suffit and I found, among those ruins, a very ancient coin, with the figure of imperial Rome on the face and the portrait of a male emperor on the reverse, a coin that I was later able to give as a gift to Mussolini. I ordered that on this site our victorious troops should present arms at the advent of Fascism and glorify in the face of the four winds and the vast desert our great victory, finally vindicated and redeemed, drawing from this occasion the best auguries for the prestige of Italy in Africa."[42]

With the advent of Fascism and the elimination of an opposition capable of criticizing the excesses of colonialism, the reconquest of Libya took on a more intense pace and an unprecedented scale.

After Gasr Yafran on November 17, 1922, Garian fell. Then came Tarhuna, on February 7, 1923. Thereafter, Zliten and Misratah City, on February 26. Last of all, Beni Ulid and all the Orfella territory, on December 27. In February 1924, the distant oases of Sinauen, Ghadames, and Mizda were reoccupied. Sirte fell last of all, on November 23, 1924.

"With the reconquest of Sirte," a triumphant Raffaele Rapex noted, "it was fair to say that Italy had restored its sovereignty over the entire part of Tripolitania that represents our most important political and economic interests. Outside of the boundaries of the territory we had occupied, south of Ghadames, Sinauen, and Mizda and south of the basins of Zemzem and Sofeggin, there remained only a few insignificant rebel organizations, driven by an age-old spirit of brigandage, more than by any feelings of political hostility."[43] Although he was generally prudent and cautious in his judgments, in this case, Rapex was wrong. The rebel organizations that were operating in the deserts of Ghibla and Fezzan were neither few in number nor motivated by a spirit of brigandage. They included a number of the most authoritative and capable leaders, who would never have agreed to compromise and who would continue to fight until the beginning of 1930, after watching their own people die of hunger, epidemics, malaria, and wounds sustained in combat.

And the rebel *mehallas* were hardly few in number and limited in activity if Rodolfo Graziani, on January 14, 1923, felt the need to send yet another letter to Mohamed Fekini, urging him, *for the last time*, to surrender: "Do you not understand that God will punish you with the loss of your relatives, your followers, and everything that you are trying to achieve?"[44] Yet again, patiently and diligently, the aged Fekini replied to Graziani, with a reconstruction of past events. If "you want to know me fully," he wrote, among other things,

> you need only observe the way I live, my letters, my speeches, my past actions, which are all recorded in the archives of the *vilayet*.... My son Hassan is dead because of orders given by your government, but also in an attempt to defend the law against Khalifa ben Askar and el-Baruni.... Our demands are written and can be found in the offices of Governor Volpi, but you have chosen to ignore them and to invade our region by force, and to the advantage of the Ibadites.[45]

Mohamed Fekini had been beaten by Graziani numerous times, but he was still alive and could count himself fortunate. Many other leaders, between 1922 and 1924, had been killed in combat, hanged,

deported, or forced into exile. To mention only a few examples, el-Hajj Koobar surrendered prior to the Italian attack on Garian and, as his reward, was tried and hanged in the market square of Misratah. Mohamed Saadun al-Shitawi was killed at Bir Tagemut while defending the southern Misratah area. In the main square of Zavia, Abeda Ben Zieri of Sorman, Mohamed Zechi Mghegh of Zavia, and Mohamed ed-Dredei of el-Alalga were hanged. Among those who fled to Egypt were Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, Abdalla Temsichet, Bashir el-Saadawi, Ahmed el-Mraied (with some 200 followers), Ahmad al-Shitawi, Omar Bu Dabbous, Ali al-Mangoush (with 700 partisans), the Sheik Mohammed Sof with his son Aon Sof (with 200 *mujahideen).*

The nationalist notables, such as Othman el-Ghizani, es-Sadegh ben el-Hag, and Khaled el-Gargani, who were by this point convinced that the game was up, also moved from Cyrenaica to Egypt. Other chieftains surrendered to the Italian authorities, after extended negotiations with Tripoli. Among them was the former government advisor Ali es-Shanta, as well as Ali Ben Tantush and Massaud Fekini, brother of the Rojeban chief.

During the course of the complete reconquest of Gefara and the Jebel, the *mujahideen* lost no fewer than 6,000 men. There were also immense civilian casualties. As Rapex reports, following the reoccupation of Zliten, "more than two thousand Arabs, with their livestock and their families, fled along the Wadi Gugas, under the bombing of our air force."[46] It had also become customary, "as an initial punitive measure," to "raze to the ground the homes of the leaders of the revolt."[47] And it was not infrequent, after battle, for "special concentration camps" to be set up to contain the population that was surrendering.[48] What counted most, however, to Mussolini's Italy, was putting an end once and for all to the resistance in Tripolitania. "Without further serious losses," the Minister for Colonies Federzoni announced in the Italian parliament, "and with only limited bloodshed, certainly no greater than those that the raids of the rebels and the Senussi brigands were already inflicting on our troops in both colonies, we have succeeded in restoring entirely in both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica not only our prestige, but also the effective rule of the Italian flag."[49]

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II

To Live and Die in the Desert

1. With the advent of Fascism, more changed than just the dynamics of military operations. The mentality of Italian colonialists changed as well, along with their style and their philosophy. As Governor Volpi wrote:

> Above and beyond our military superiority, we also and more importantly possess a *moral* superiority, which derives from the worth and power of our historic traditions and from the greatness of the civilizing task that Italy has performed for so many centuries. . . . A civilization like ours cannot bow down, in the face of the native, cannot admit any compromise nor adapt to tortuous half-measures, but must instead continue straight ahead toward its own ultimate affirmation without allowing anything to stand in its way."[1]

Even more precise and succinct were the statements of the Minister for Colonies Federzoni:

> No more specious negotiations with the rebels under the just dominion of the Italian flag; no more cowardly hesitation in applying the simplest and clearest criteria of a policy that would be consistent with our rights and our interests; no more of the circumspect heaviness of massive military hierarchies, slow to turn on their more agile adversary hordes; instead, now, the resolute use of a few, rapid, lethal columns, commanded by someone with a lucid awareness of the goal to be attained at any and all costs.[2]

For Giuseppe Bottai, finally, true colonialism began only under Fascism. Everything that had gone before, from the landings at

Assab in 1922, bespoke nothing but

> flashes of capricious improvisation, disconnected, with no guiding vision, wavering, with the holy ark of parliament, somewhere between the infatuations of a purely military mentality.... and the sedentary visions of a prefect's limited mentality, capable of nothing more than foreseeing the organization of a few metropolitan centers along the coast, but incapable of envisioning the greater objectives of a serious colonial policy.[3]

Volpi was not only capable of laying out the new course of Italian colonialism, he was also capable of translating it into reality. In the 36 months of his governorship, he reconquered all of northern Tripolitania at a fairly limited cost, with a fairly low rate of casualties: 620 dead, 1,924 wounded, and 38 missing in action.[4] According to Italian sources, in that same period, the Arabs suffered 6,500 dead. And yet, the *mujahideen* resistance had not been completely shattered. In August and September of 1923, the Arabs, with the military and financial support of the Senussi Mohammed Safi ed-Din, had still proven capable of organizing a broad and far-reaching offensive against the towns of Gusbat, Tarhuna, and Misratah, to such a degree that among the Italians, there was fear of a general insurrection, like the one that had rocked Tripolitania in 1915. And in fact, that was what Safi ed-Din hoped to achieve; in his attack on Misratah alone, he had used no fewer than 5,000 men, while the local populace had certainly not merely stood by and watched.

2. Another disturbing factor for the government in Tripoli was the aggressive *mehallas* that roved freely through the vast desert region at the edges of the Hamada al Hamra. They were under the command of Mohamed Fekini, the brothers Ahmed and Mahdi es-Sunni, the elderly Tuareg chieftain Sultan Ahmud, and the brothers Muktar and Ahmed Rasem Koobar. Their movements, especially those of Mohamed Fekini, were closely tracked by Volpi with the greatest attention and immediately reported to Minister Federzoni. On May 25, 1923, for instance, Volpi reported that "informers tell us that Mohamed Fekini is still at Derg, and in no condition to move."[5] On June 25, he wrote, "Mohamed Fekini is said to have moved to Umm el-Assim, one and a half day's march to the south of Derg, accompanied by only a very few men."[6] In October, however, the news became increasingly worrisome, though not all the reports were confirmed.

"Fekini and Sultan Ahmud continue to raid the Derg-Sinauen area, assembling armed men, in part in the name of Sanusiya.... One of Fekini's sons is said to be organizing a large caravan of six or seven hundred camels in Tatuine, in French territory.... Captain Vitale, who lives at Nalut, would place the number, according to his sources, at roughly one thousand men in the *mehalla* organized in Ghibla by Fekini and the es-Sunni brothers."[7]

On November 13, 1923, Volpi sent a new report to Rome:

> In my previous letters I have repeatedly mentioned the activity that has been noted in the past few months in Ghibla, on the part of a number of Tripolitanian Senussi individuals, such as Mohamed Fekini and Sultan Ahmud, supported and encouraged by Safi ed-Din himself....[8] These desperate individuals from Ghibla have attempted to launch a surprise attack on two separate occasions on the westernmost outpost of Nalut.... The *mehalla*, enveloped by our detachments not far from Wadi Tolts, not only left about a hundred corpses on the field of battle... but was also obliged to flee entirely in great disorder, pursued by our horsemen all the way to Tail and Ouar.[9]

After Fekini's unsuccessful attempt to conquer Nalut, and the occupation of Ghadames on February 16, 1924, by Major Volpini, the situation in Ghibla became increasingly untenable for the *mujahideen*. Volpi celebrated his victory and wrote on February 25, 1924, "The occupation of Ghadames has delivered a final and decisive blow to the rebel organization, scattering its few remaining forces, depriving them of a new and substantial mass of military materiel, and obliging the leading figures of the revolt to seek safety, directionless and discredited, in the furthest regions."[10]

Between January and May 1925—according to the daily reports that Volpi sent to Rome—nothing unsettling happened, nothing that could disturb "the great tranquility of the territory." If there were any clouds on the horizon, they seemed exceedingly distant, in Shati and Fezzan, and Volpi seemed not to give them much thought. Indeed, he wrote, "The information that we have concerning the activities of the two leading rebellious notables in the southwest, Mohamed Fekini, the exile from the Jebel who is our irreducible enemy, and Ahmed es-Sunni, the greatest follower of Sanusiya in Tripolitania, is vague but seems to agree that they are determined to act. We have confirmation that they have traveled to Murzuq, near Khalifa Zaui, in order to argue in favor of the Sef en-Nasser joining together and uniting with them."[11]

Volpi did not limit his actions to driving the rebels ever southward, to the very edges of Fezzan, into entirely inhospitable regions where it would be almost impossible for them to replace the weapons and mounts that they had lost. He also arranged to institute even worse sanctions against the rebels. With decree law no. 1/211 dated February 28, 1924, he ordered the confiscation of all the movable property and real estate of 13 rebel leaders, among them Mohamed Fekini, Mohammed Sof el-Mahmudi, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, Mohammed Farhat, and Massaud Fekini.[12] Massaud Fekini, who had committed the error of turning himself in to the Italian authorities rather than following his brother Mohamed into the Ghibla desert, was sentenced on February 28, 1924, to life imprisonment because, "during the rebellion that broke out in Tripolitania subsequent to 26 January 1922, he had borne arms against the state."[13]

3. The information that Governor Volpi had gathered about Fekini was correct. At the end of 1924, Mohamed Fekini and his people abandoned the oases of Ghibla and moved to Fezzan, more distant and secure. Their move was prompted in part by the pressure of the Italian forces but also by that of their Libyan allies, the Misciascia, led by Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen and the Ulad Bu Sef led by Ahmed Ghirza, who, in November 1924, had traveled with Graziani to Tripoli to solemnly express their obedience to Governor Volpi.

The exodus of Mohamed Fekini and his people toward Fezzan truly had biblical aspects. There were hundreds of Rojeban and Zintan warriors, traveling with their families, as well as many thousands of camels and horses. In Fekini's memoirs, he does not specify the route they took to reach Murzuq, the capital of Fezzan, but in all likelihood, the aged chieftain of the Rojeban chose the ancient track that ran from Mizda and passed through el-Gheria el-Garbia, el-Hassi, Ederi, Tekertiha, and Tessawa. It was a 16-day march if Ghibli and enemy tribes did not interfere.

Mohamed Fekini was not the only rebel leader obliged to take refuge in Fezzan. Nearly all the surviving leaders, from the es-Sunni brothers, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, and Ahmed es-Sed to the Sef en-Nasser brothers, Mohammed Farhat, and es-Suei el-Keituni—excepting those that had chosen to flee to Egypt or Tunisia, one after another fetched up at Murzuq, creating a state of considerable tension. In Murzuq, in fact, Khalifa Zaui had "ruled" since 1918. A native of Zavia, he had gone to Fezzan during World War One at the orders of the Turkish commander Tacab Bey. Once the war was over, Tacab Bey returned

to the homeland, leaving Khalifa Zaui in command; from that time forward, Khalifa Zaui subjected the population to the worst abuses and the most unjustifiable extortions. In October 1924, having clearly sensed the general direction that affairs were taking, he wrote a letter of complete surrender to Governor Volpi, closing his message with the following words: "I am ready to deliver to you everything that is under my command, immediately if you so desire."[14]

The arrival in Murzuq of thousands of so-called "emigrants," with their leaders whose personalities were strong, to say the least, created a state of all-enveloping confusion in both the city and the district. Before long, violent clashes had broken out between Khalifa Zaui's gendarmerie and the partisans of Abd en-Nebi Belcher and Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser, who were claiming to replace the former sergeant of the Ottoman army as rulers of Fezzan. The disorder was so great that several delegations of inhabitants of Fezzan came to see Mohamed Fekini, to beg him to take the position of prefect of Fezzan, a position in which, for that matter, he had already served under Turkish rule. Fekini, however, refused to take the office, though he did promise to do everything he could to restore peace and order in the region.[15]

For a number of months, Fekini became the arbiter of the situation. On July 14, 1925, Khalifa Zaui wrote to him, asking for his help against Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser, who was arriving from the oases of Al Jufrah, making forced marches with a considerable number of armed men, to wage war on him.[16] On August 26, it was Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser's turn to ask Fekini for his urgent help: "We are asking for your support in the name of our brotherhood and our long-time friendship, as well as in the name of our common obedience to our emir. . . . We have fought Khalifa at Tawilah and we have beaten him. For the moment he is besieged by our troops at Murzuq."[17]

Even once he had been beaten, Khalifa Zaui was not quick to surrender, and on November 9, 1925, he wrote once again to Mohamed Fekini that he was willing, in the interests of averting further loss of human life and halting the war, to resign his position and turn over the command of the *liwa* to its original inhabitants, on the condition, however, that also Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser and Abd en-Nebi Belcher leave Fezzan.[18] Between November 9 and 17, 1925, Fekini put to use all his experience as a veteran negotiator and all his wisdom in attempting to forge an accord among the various rivals.[19] To Khalifa Zaui, he wrote, among other things: "I swear to you, in the name of Allah, that we have not come here to take a position of responsibility or to appropriate power, but rather to repair the Muslim state

and halt the tragedies of war. I have accepted the temporary role of arbitrator in order to assist you in attaining reconciliation with your adversaries and restoring unity against the long-term enemy so as to reestablish peace and security."[20]

Despite the wisdom and passion that Fekini showed in guiding the agreement to completion, it lasted only a few weeks. Without warning, conflict broke out again between Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser and Khalifa Zaui, though the latter was no longer capable of fighting the Sef en-Nasser family. In a clear-eyed report to Mussolini, the Minister for Colonies Lanza di Scalea reported that "the gradual but tenacious reorganization of the rebel forces" was largely being managed by the Sef en-Nasser family, which had its centers of power in the oases of Jufrah and in Fezzan. He further noted that the supplies that the rebels were procuring in Algeria and Tunisia could allow them to "run the risk of launching a new campaign without excessive logistical concerns, indeed with the confidence that they could rely upon lines of retreat that were ready and secure for any and all unfavorable eventualities." Warning against the danger of "hotbeds of rebellion that are extremely close to the front lines of the areas that we occupy," Lanza di Scalea ended his report with this suggestion: "I see no other solution to all this, other than to implement the plan for occupying the line of the oases (Jufrah, Zella, Marada, Gialo), a plan that Your Excellency already knows through the general plan put in place since last June by the government of Tripolitania."[21]

The plan in question was also supported by the new governor of Tripolitania, General Emilio De Bono, who had landed in the colony, as Volpi's replacement, on June 2, 1925. But it was rejected by the chief of staff, Major General Pietro Badoglio, who stated: "Considering the current situation in Tripolitania, I therefore believe that it is advisable absolutely not to venture any further south than Bu Ngem and el-Gheriat, but that instead we should work to consolidate the occupation that has thus far been successfully completed."[22] De Bono accepted the decision, having little alternative, but writing to the minister for colonies. "In a highly confidential message," he freely criticized the central government for wasting "the two months and twenty-one days since the plan for this operation was first presented."[23]

In Murzuq, meanwhile, the situation was rapidly deteriorating. On March 19, 1926, Khalifa Zaui wrote a feverish letter to Mohamed Fekini defending himself against charges of breach of discipline and disobedience "and swearing that he had nothing against Muslims, indeed, praying to God to afford them victory."[24] It was,

unquestionably, a last-ditch effort to win protection at a time in which he felt himself to be besieged and without other options. But, as Fekini writes, Khalifa Zaui actually managed to "flee toward the Italian lines."[25] We know about the rest of his adventure from a report that De Bono sent to the minister for colonies.

With the expulsion of Khalifa Zaui and having occupied Murzuq and all of Fezzan, Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser, who already vaunted the title of vice-emir, put the government of the *liwa* into the hands of Abd en-Nebi Belcher. But there was still plenty of unsettling news to come for the government in Tripoli. In the Shati, there had been a meeting of dissident leaders, during the course of which it had been decided to establish three permanent armed camps, the first of the three in the Wadi Ruaus; the second to the south of el-Gheriat and Mizda; and the third at el-Hassi, in the western Shati. "The purposes of the armed camps," De Bono pointed out, "were, it is believed, to guard the three lines of access to Fezzan; to attempt any possible sudden blows at our garrisons; and to intensify the campaign of raiding and looting."[26] This was not, certainly, the ideal way to pay homage to Benito Mussolini, who had landed in person in Tripoli on April 11, 1926, having come to the colony for a five-day visit aboard the battleship *Cavour*.

4. With a "top secret" report 14 pages long, on June 4, 1926, the governor of Tripolitania, General Emilio De Bono, updated the minister for colonies, Prince Lanza di Scalea, on the situation that had come into existence "in the Tripolitanian hinterland, especially following the escape of Khalifa Zaui from Fezzan. This situation revolved especially around the figures of the Sef en-Nasser brothers, who had succeeded, through their skillful maneuvering among the nomadic groups of the Ghibla and the population of the Shati and the Fezzan, in achieving their dreams of supremacy over the latter."

De Bono estimated the rebel forces as numbering about 6,000 rifles present in Ghibla, the Shati, Fezzan, and the far eastern Sirte region—sufficient in number to constitute a serious danger for the Italian outposts. He suggested, therefore, resuming the advance toward the south which had been put off repeatedly for financial reasons. All the same, he specified "that a movement on Bu-Ngem-Sokna should be taken as the beginning of a campaign that ultimately aims at the resolution of the entire situation in southern Tripolitania," which is to say, the complete occupation of Fezzan. De Bono added, "I am explicitly asking Your Excellency to provide me with the honor and responsibility

of being supreme commander of the operations, whose operational command can be taken on by General Cicconetti."[27]

But it would take six more months and the return of Federzoni to the ministry for colonies, before De Bono's plan received new consideration. On November 24, 1926, Federzoni sent Mussolini an extensive report on the situation in Tripolitania, which faithfully followed De Bono's reports and suggestions. After pointing out that the ideal time to have definitively liquidated the rebellion had been the fall and winter of 1924–1925, the minister stated: "On the other hand, the thirty months of absolute inaction at the highest military levels allowed events to develop that were distinctly unfavorable to our side and, as a result, allowed the various scattered groups of enemy fighters to regroup to our disadvantage." That said, he proposed the leap forward suggested by De Bono, which would have cost "the state an outlay of fifty to sixty million lire, on a one-time basis."[28]

Mussolini gave Federzoni an affirmative answer, specifying all the same that it would be necessary to "plan the operation in such a way that it is worth the cost, and that it not be excessively burdensome in financial terms."[29] A further six months would go by, however, before the first ten million lire were budgeted for the undertaking. One entirely unpredictable development weighed heavily on the decision: the defection of the chieftain of the Misciascia, Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, who had been working for the past few years as an invaluable ally of Graziani, and who had performed great services for the Italians.

At the beginning of November 1927, De Bono met in Rome with the Minister for Colonies Federzoni; the governor of Cyrenaica, Attilio Teruzzi; and General Mezzetti, to put the finishing touches on the operational plan. This plan entailed three phases: 1) a territorial connection of the two Libyan colonies along the Sirtic arc and the solution of the problem of the Mogarba er-Raedat, under the leadership of the Senussi chief Saleh el-Ateusc, who had never submitted to Italian rule; 2) occupation of the chain of oases running along the 29th parallel: archipelago of Jufrah, Zella, Marada, and Augila-Gialo; 3) clearing all territories north of the 29th parallel and consolidation of political and military domination of the region with the establishment of numerous garrisons.

This operation, which covered a territory of roughly 150,000 square kilometers, or 58,000 square miles (nearly half the peninsula), involved 20,000 men (largely Eritrean ascars, Savaris, Spahis, and Meharists), 7 batteries of cannon, 3 squadrons of light armor, 22

airplanes (fighters and bombers), 300 hundred trucks, and 5,000 transport camels. Not since 1912, at the end of the Italian-Turkish war, had such a deployment of forces and equipment been seen in Libya. But the volume of fire that the new detachments were able to put out was more than twice what had been possible during the war with Turkey.

The Libyan rebels, in contrast, were able to field 3,700 rifles in the Tripoli area and 2,600 rifles in the Cyrenaica area, plus a few cannons and small numbers of machine guns. And yet, they largely managed to elude the jaws of the vise that had been deployed against them by Graziani, Mezzetti, Maletti, and Pintor, and had successfully reached safety further south, as far afield as the distant oasis of Uau el-Khebir. On February 25, 1928, at the wells of Tagrift, they made a remarkable show of determination; the Sef en-Nasser brothers came startlingly close to victory against the column commanded by Graziani.[30]

During the various battles, the Tripolitanian aviation repeatedly used poison phosgene gases, to devastating effects. "A demonstration of the overwhelming effectiveness of the bombing raids," wrote General Cicconetti in a report to Governor De Bono, "can be seen in the fact that as soon as our aircraft appear over the horizon, vast numbers of the enemy scatter immediately, vanishing into the distance."[31] Emilio De Bono provided the Italian chamber of deputies with the figure of "2,302 armed enemy soldiers killed" over the entire course of the various operations.[32] Cicconetti judged this number to be far too low, because the actual number of gas victims was never established. And Cicconetti knew perfectly well that the terrible combination of carbon monoxide and chlorine was almost invariably fatal.

The operations along the 29th parallel had barely come to an end when the rebel threat was felt again in Ghibla, in the Sirte region, and in Jufrah. With a daring march across the desert, the Misciascia chieftain, Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, moved from the safety of Shati to the group of oases of el-Gheriat, and on July 11, 1928, attacked the Second Libyan Battalion stationed at Chormet bu Garra, 150 kilometers (95 miles) from Tripoli, partially destroying that force in a battle that lasted 13 hours. This development was so worrisome that De Bono devoted a number of pages to it in his *Diary*: "The enemy subsequently withdrew, but our casualties included six wounded officers, and sixty Askars killed and one hundred wounded. Many, far too many. All the more if we consider that there were no more than three

hundred rebels. Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen displayed extraordinary daring and skill.... We took a hard blow."[33]

While Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen was attacking Chormet bu Garra and sending several cavalry detachments toward Jebel Garian in a bid to disrupt communications between Mizda and Garian and threaten the capital with the looming rebel presence, the brothers Ahmed and Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser left the far-flung oasis of Uau el-Khebir and made a 600-kilometer (375-mile) march at night to elude aerial reconnaissance, reaching the oases of Jufrah with 800 armed men. On October 31, they made contact at Bir el-Afie with the Jufrah mobile force commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Amato. An exceedingly violent battle ensued, bloody and seesawing back and forth. Then the *mujahideen* were forced to withdraw to Uau el-Khebir, and in the long march, more men died of thirst than had perished in the fighting. The Sef en-Nasser brothers had orchestrated in the Jufrah, where they had held sway for centuries, a full-blown popular insurrection. In order to suppress that insurrection, in the wake of the battle of Bir el-Afie, De Bono ordered the execution by hanging of 19 notables. "Quite a few, eh!" he wrote in his *Diary.* "Unfortunately, it is necessary to set examples of this sort."[34]

The final offensive planned by the *mujahideen*, then, was a partial failure, even though on October 29, 1928 a *mehalla* of 200 Mogarba er-Raedat tribesmen had dared to attack the port of Marsa el Brega. The *mujahideen*, despite their impetuous tactics and a number of victories, failed to achieve the decisive breakthrough in the Italian lines that had led to the "great Arab revolt" of 1915. Nonetheless, they were still numerous and highly motivated. And, had they been left in peace in Fezzan, they might well, as De Bono feared, have succeeding in reorganizing and attempting a new uprising.

12

Mohamed Fekini's Last Raid

1. In an attempt to suppresss definitively the rebellion in Libya, Mussolini appointed on December 18, 1928, Marshal Pietro Badoglio as the sole governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in order to allow him to act in a unified and efficient manner. And he immediately budgeted the 21 million lire needed to reconquer Fezzan and stamp out all surviving brushfires of the revolt.

Badoglio arrived in Tripoli on January 24, 1929; that same day he issued two proclamations: one intended for the Italians, the other meant for the Libyans. In the first proclamation, he announced that "the agricultural and demographic colonization of Tripolitania is no longer an abstract goal, but a concrete reality. The same thing, quite soon, will happen in Cyrenaica.... The government will support all healthy and prosperous initiatives. I give you my solemn promise." In addressing the Libyans, in contrast, Badoglio used quite a different sort of language, menacing and brutal: "O inhabitants of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, you all have been familiar for years now with the Italian government, and you know that it can be just and benevolent toward those who submit with pure hearts to our laws and orders; we also know how to be implacable and merciless toward those few outlaws who, in their folly, delude themselves into believing that they can oppose the invincible power of Italy."[1]

Badoglio's proclamation to the Libyans, posted in every street and diffused via all types of mediua, from camels to airplanes, came to the attention of Mohamed Fekini as well; in this period, Fekini lived with his family and part of his tribe at Qalb Marzouq, not far from Adiri, a major crossroads for traffic in the Sahara. The brutal tone of the proclamation could hardly fail to insult Fekini, who could not accept that his unflagging love of his Tripolitanian homeland should be described

as folly. On February 22, 1929, Fekini responded to Badoglio with a letter that would later be found on April 22 by Lieutenant Colonel Galliani on the battlefield of Umm el-Melah. Once again, the Rojeban chieftain summarized the history of Italo-Libyan relations over the previous ten years with an accuracy and honesty that could scarcely be questioned. He wrote, for instance:

> Then came Count Volpi, with whom we undertook negotiations in full sincerity, in a bid to win peace for ourselves and our country. As we carried on these negotiations, Count Volpi, treacherously moved against us with armed force, led by General Graziani and the Berbers. Instead of the foregiveness that we expected from the Italian government, our houses were destroyed and our blood was shed. Even a great many of those who submitted to Italian rule wound up, variously, on the gallows, executed by firing squad, or in prison, with the confiscation of all their possessions.

Following his denunciation of the treachery and violence of the governors of Tripoli, Mohamed Fekini continue, "If the government truly wishes to engage in negotiations and offer pardons, let it send a commission of reliable Italians and sincere Tripoli notables, let it release its prisoners, restore the confiscated property, and repay us for the damages that we have suffered, and allow us to keep our weapons for a few more years....I beg you to convey this letter of mine to the governor, and if he deigns to check my behavior in the record books, he will see that I have always obeyed the Statute.... I have always worked honorably and conscientiously."[2]

As late as 1929, after ten years of suffering, battles, grief, and disappointments, Mohamed Fekini still hoped that Italy might change its views, resume negotiations, and honor and allow the completion of the Statute. He did not know that the new governor, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, to whom he had addressed his letter, was in fact the harshest, most merciless of all the long series of Italian governors that had been sent to Libya. This was the man who would shortly thereafter authorize the deportation of 100,000 people from Cyrenaica; who would order the construction of 13 horrifying concentration camps, where 40,000 Libyans would die; and who would order the execution by hanging of Omar al-Mukhtar, the leader of the resistance in Cyrenaica, in the prison camp of Solug.[3]

Mohamed Fekini did not know Badoglio, but it was impossible to miss the fact that his proclamation was hardly intended to win the sympathy of those Libyans who had been fighting for two decades

to achieve the freedoms and rights that had been promised so often but never delivered. In response to that ill-concieved proclamation, as Lieutenant Colonel Arsenio Belardinelli recalls, "the chief commanders of the rebellion, the Sef en-Nasser brothers, Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, Mohamed Fekini, the Sunni brothers, came together in two conferences, at Maharuga and Birghen (February 1929), where they agreed to establish a plan of action and implement it in opposition to the government."[4] By this time, they were almost out of money and other resources, as Belardinelli points out, and they were exhausted by years of physical and mental suffering; nonetheless, their fighting spirit and determination were as staunch as they had been in 1911, when they had first come together to drive the invaders back into the sea over which they had come.

The plan that had been developed by the dissident Arab chieftains had a fair amount of imagination and potential for success, though it badly underestimated the degree to which the Italian defenses had been reinforced over the previous years, especially underestimating the reinforcement of Libyan auxiliary forces. The plan called for three nearly simultaneous operations: the *mehallas* of Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, Mohamed Fekini, and Salem Ben Abd en-Nebi were supposed to converge on the Ghibla, where they would join forces with the men led by the Sef en-Nasser brothers at el-Gheriat, an extremely important hub for maneuvers. The occupation of el-Gheriat would aid greatly in the subsequent march northward. At the same time, Saleh el-Ateusc would ride down from the Harugi es-Soda mountains to carry out raids along the Mediterranean coast, between en-Nofilia and Ajdabiya, in an attempt to sow confusion and draw enemy forces into this sector.

The Italian air force managed to identify the rebel movements as early as late March 1929, when Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, Mohamed Fekini, and Salem Ben Abd en-Nebi had already advanced past el-Gheria el-Garbia and were moving toward the Jebel where, as Belardinelli points out, they "all had old accounts to settle with the Berbers."[5] At dawn on April 9, the *mehallas* made a surprise attack on the observation outpost of Bir Allagh, south of Jadu, wiping out its garrison of 50 horsemen under the command of the *Shumbashi* Amor Biala. After this successful beginning, however, the *mujahideen* met with repeated harsh defeats: on April 17 at Kaf el-Metchia; on April 22 at Umm el-Melah, in the high Zemzem; on May 9 at Udei el-Chel; on May 26 at the wells of esc-Sciueref. Saleh el-Ateusc was likewise soundly defeated by the 7th Savari Squadron at Umm ar Rish and,

later, by Colonel Tracchia at Wadi er-Rtem. This truly marked the end of all resistance. The tattered remains of the defeated *mehallas* withdrew to the western Shati, and a few months later, they chose to go into exile in Sudan or Algeria, chased by the unrelenting pressure of Graziani's troops.

2.

During the course of this final and less than successful raid, Mohamed Fekini repeatedly ran the risk of being killed, and his death was even announced by the Italians, with accompanying banner stories in the press and a certain amount of gloating. Though he was now over 70 years old, with deteriorating eyesight, Fekini insisted on taking part in the raid that he had helped to plan. Accompanied by his son Lamine, just 19 years old, he led the Rojeban warriors for hundreds of kilometers, staying in the saddle ten hours a day. He had taken part in the battle of Bir Allagh, and then he had traveled, with Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, toward Al Qaryat, in the high Zemzem, where he expected to join forces with the *mehalla* of the Sef en-Nasser brothers. But once they reached Mileh, they were first bombed heavily by five airplanes and, shortly thereafter, attacked by Italian and Libyan soldiers. The fighting lasted all day and, as Fekini recalls, 17 Rojeban were killed, and "most of our animals were hit; only a few transport camels survived, and we had also lost our water supply."[6]

Fearing further bombing attacks, Mohamed Fekini and Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen ordered their followers to turn back toward Fezzan. It was a horrifying march. For six days, the *mujahideen* suffered from thirst, and many of them died. They finally reached a small lake, where they were able to refresh themselves and stock up on water. But shortly thereafter, in the town of Umm el-Melah, they were again attacked by Italians, this time soldiers from the Jebel Group under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Galliani. The battle on April 22, among the impracticable spurs of the Wadi Zemzem, was brutal, and the *mehallas* of Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen and Mohamed Fekini were decimated.

While the surviving *mujahideen* withdrew southward on the field of battle, scattered with corpses, Galliani's soldiers found a dead Arab who resembled Mohamed Fekini and, lying next to him, a horse that they assumed was his. The chief of the Rojeban wrote: "They took him for Mohamed Fekini, cut off his head, and gave it to one of the pilots, who immediately flew with it back to Tripoli, where he gave it to the governor. May Allah curse them! And then they announced the news in their newspapers."[7]

Once he reached safety in Fezzan and learned that the newspapers in Tripoli were reporting his death and rejoicing over his demise, Fekini sent this telegram to Lieutenant Colonel Galliani: "Hajj Mohamed Fekini is alive and well and expects, God willing, a great victory over you and the explusion of the Italians from Tripoli. Go to hell, O evil and deceitful people! Allah, the all-powerful, will take revenge upon you, using us as His instrument."[8]

3. Now that they had routed the *mehallas* of the last rebel leaders, Badoglio and Graziani took advantage of their success and the bewilderment of the nomadic peoples of Ghibla to disarm them completely, gathering up 1,450 rifles. Subsequently, while planning the invasion of Fezzan, they also attempted to gain control of the region by offering amnesty and new negotiations with the dissident leaders.

And, in fact, on November 29, 1929, Mohamed Fekini received a letter signed by Colonel Moramarco, commander of the zone south of Nalut, inviting him to take part in Tripoli in the proceedings of a peace commission. The terms of the invitation were vague and ambiguous, but Fekini decided to accept in good faith the apparent good intentions of Colonel Moramarco and entrusted his son Ali Nouredine, who had been his chief aide and right-hand man for the previous several years, with the mission. And it is from the memoirs of Ali Nouredine that we are able to reconstruct yet another in the long list of deceits perpetrated by the Italian authorities.

Ali Nouredine left Dhamran, west of Adiri, where he was staying with his family and part of the Rojeban tribe, accompanied by two notables, Qaubi Abdel Rahman Qarinat and Ahmed al-Rahibi. Here is his account:

> On 3 December 1929 I took the road to el-Gheriat, passing through the village of Tamam and through Hasy Tissan. When we arrived in Auenat Uennin, we found a number of Italian vehicles waiting for us, and we got in and left for El Hamada. We reached et-Tabunia in the evening, and were welcomed by the chieftain Ali al-Houbub. With him, on 17 December we reached Al Qaryat al Charqiyah. The following day, after my meeting with the Italian leader, Colonel Ugo Gigliarelli, commander of the southern regions, we returned by car to Auenat Uennin. Then we took the road for Ramlah and, after Sebha, we joined the Arabs who were withdrawing from Fezzan to go into exile in Algeria.... In all, it took us forty-four days, because of the grueling march through the desert. Moreover, the horse that I was riding and the dromedary that was transporting our supplies were both

> very weak. It was winter, it was bitterly cold, and fear reigned in these deserts because the enemy was advancing from Ghadames and Dary. And so we were only able to make very slow progress. Oh, how we suffered![9]

Ali Nouredine makes no reference in his notes to the outcome of his conversation with Colonel Gigliarelli, but he does explain why, instead of following the route agreed with Colonel Moramarco—Ramlah, Dary, Nalut, Tripoli—to meet the governor General Badoglio, with whom he was supposed to discuss a truce and peace, once he reached Hasy Tissan and learned that Italian troops under Graziani's command were already marching on Fezzan and had occupied Brach, Ali Nouredine and his two traveling companions were obliged to change their plans and meet with Colonel Gigliarelli instead of Badoglio. And it is truly astonishing and deplorable that Badoglio and Graziani should have invited Libyan chieftains to Tripoli to begin peace negotiations at the same time that they were beginning hostilities by invading Fezzan.

It is also surprising that Colonel Gigliarelli did not detain the young Fekini as a prisoner, since hostilities had already begun. But perhaps the explanation for this failure to abuse his power can be found in the safe-conduct pass that Colonel Gigliarelli supplied to Ali Nouredine; it reads, verbatim: "Comando Zona T.S. Allow the native Ali el Figheni, or his appointed delegate, to travel to Auenat Uennin and the Western Rambla to summon his soldiers, who must travel north. They are carrying two weapons. Bir el Koor, 18 December 1929, Colonel Commander Ugo Gigliarelli."[10] It is clear that young Fekini had promised Gigliarelli that he would arrange for his people to surrender, but after he was driven back to Auenat Uennin, he mounted his horse and galloped to join his comrades, who were already moving toward the Algerian border.

Let us now take a step backward in time. In the month of November 1929, Badoglio and Graziani were completing their logistical preparations for the invasion of Fezzan; they initially planned to operate with a single column of men and vehicles along the esc-Sciueref-Brach-Sebha-Murzuq axis, following the route originally used in 1913 by Colonel Antonio Miani.

The column, made up of 4,000 men,[11] all either mounted or riding in trucks and protected by air cover, was supposed to drive a wedge between the rebel formations, which were deployed to the east and west. While in point of fact the Aulad Suleiman were stationed

in the region of Uau el-Khebir, under the command of the Sef en-Nasser brothers, the rebels of the Rojeban, Zintan, Misciascia, Ulad Bu Sef, and Orfella tribes were deployed around Ubari and under the command, respectively, of Mohamed Fekini, Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, Hamed Ben Hassen ben Ali, and Abd en-Nebi Belcher. There were perhaps 1,500 soldiers, a mass of troops of some considerable strength but fragmented and exhausted from their recent defeats.

On December 6,, Brach was occupied without a shot being fired. On December 14, Sebha fell. At this point in the advance, Graziani, who had taken overall command of operations, was supposed to move toward Murzuq; instead, he suddenly changed objective and decided to turn left to go and beat the Sef en-Nasser brothers in their stronghold of Uau el-Khebir. But the Sef en-Nasser brothers refused to accept battle and withdrew to the distant oasis of Kufra, which would not be occupied until January 20, 1931. Having eliminated the threat to the east, Graziani continued his march and occupied Murzuq on January 21, 1930, and Ubari four days later. Here he learned, from aerial reconnaissance, that the rebels, after a halt in the villages of Serdeles and Tachiomet, were withdrawing further, drawing ever closer to the border with Algeria.

This unexpected and pacific conclusion to the offensive could hardly have pleased Graziani. He wanted not only to defeat but exterminate his adversaries, who had caused him so much trouble over the previous decade. And so he decided to pursue and defeat them before they could cross the border into Algeria. But every thrust designed to block the rebels came up empty, and Graziani, furious at his inability to obtain a decisive battle,[12] ordered the commander of the Libyan air force, General Ferruccio Ranza, to scramble all the Caproni and Romeo aircraft available and to pursue the fleeing *mehallas*. For three days, from February 12 to 14, the aircraft flew missions along the border, bombing and strafing, as one eyewitness, the journalist Sandro Sandri recalls, "the herd of humanity consisting of soldiers, but also a multitude of women and children. Their livestock followed behind them."[13]

In his memoirs, Mohamed Fekini confirmed that the Italian aircraft, hot on their tails, "dropped an incessant hail of bombs."[14] He estimates that there were 25,000 refugees, but in fact there were far fewer, between five and six thousand, including *mujahideen* and their family members. The livestock, which was their only asset, included six thousand camels and a few hundred horses and oxen.

Abd en-Nebi Belcher, with his followers and the people of Orfella, crossed the Libyan-Algerian border on February 12and surrendered to the French authorities at Fort Charlet, in the oasis of Djanet. The bulk of the rebels, on the other hand, crossed the border 200 kilometers (125 miles) further north, surrendering to the French garrison of Fort Tarat. Among them were some of the most prestigious names of the rebellion: Mohamed Fekini and his sons, the leader of the Misciascia Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen, the chief of the Ulad bu Sef, and Hamed Ben Hassen ben Ali.[15]

To some, crossing the border into Algeria represented the end of years of privations and anguish, years lived just a step ahead of the hangman. For others, like Abd en-Nebi Belcher, the all-powerful master of the Orfella tribe, in contrast, it was just one step closer to a tragic death. During a march through the region of Ouargla in the Great Eastern Erg, he lost his way and perished of thirst, along with 50 of his *mujahideen*. No trace of their bodies was ever found.

4. Between the day that his eldest son Hassan died—in the battle with Khalifa ben Askar that marked the dissolution of Mohamed Fekini's ties with the government of Tripoli and the end of his hopes to restore the Fundamental Law—and February 1930, when he left Libya once and for all, under a hail of bombs, and went into exile with his people in Algeria, ten long years passed. Years in the desert, one of the most arid and inhospitable deserts on earth. There is no corner of this desert, from Mizda to Ghat, from Ghadames to Wadi Zemzem, where Fekini did not spend some time, did not set up camp, did not fall to his knees to pray to his God, did not dig graves (how many he could not even remember) to bury his people, his beloved and loyal Rojeban.

Of this endless, agonizing journey that extended over a decade, there is practically no trace in Fekini's memoirs where he speaks essentially of men—courageous and cowardly; loyal and corrupt; and of battles, lost and won, as well as betrayals and acts of extreme generosity. Most of all, he speaks of the enemy, the Italian invader who arrived from the sea, with his death-dealing weapons, the battleships that pulverized villages with their mighty cannons, the airplanes that watch over you from the sky, the bombs that unleashing poisonous gases. And then there was the foulest weapon of them all—corruption and bribery, which drove a country rapidly to ruin.

It is understandable that Mohamed would not have spent time describing his time in the desert because the Rojeban are a seminomadic

tribe and therefore accustomed to long journeys, to precise calculation of the distances between one well and the next; to following desert tracks even when the Ghibli is blowing, erasing all paths. Nor do we see in these memoirs much space devoted to emotions at least ones other than courage, nobility, and contempt for traitors and those who break their word.

Even his grief over the deaths of his sons is barely noted here, as if it would be a sign of weakness to linger over that pain. The killing of Hassan is mentioned twice, that of Hussein once, in passing. But we know from Mohamed Fekini's relatives that he lost other children and grandchildren during the course of this interminable journey through the desert. They were not killed in combat, like the first two; they died of hunger and malaria: Aicha and Oufaya, to name two.[16] For his second wife, Aicha Nouir,[17] who lived alongside him for nearly half a century, he says not a word and makes no effort to commemorate a single episode from their long marriage. He makes no mention of her face. Nor does Fekini mention the children that were born in the desert and who must certainly have brought joy to his family. Foremost among them was Mohieddine, born in 1925 at Uenzerich in Fezzan, who would one day become prime minister of Libya under King Idris and also under Oufaya and Mariam.

From the memoirs of Fekini, we see primarily an individual who knew how to use dialectics as a weapon. Arabs and Italians agreed that he possessed excellent qualities as both an administrator and a mediator. They also agreed that he was capable of fearsome and unparalleled violence that he was stubborn, unbending, whenever someone or something offended his sense of honor and justice. Graziani wrote that the aged Fekini personally slit the throats of thirty Ibadites with his own hand.[18] This is an absolute lie: a macabre legend perpetrated by Graziani. Still, certain pages of his memoirs drip with hatred. He is the only Arab leader described in official Italian documents as "irreducible," "our irremediable enemy." He alone, in fact, refused to compromise.

When he crossed the Libyan-Algerian border, Mohamed Fekini was certainly a man who had lost a great battle, and moreover, a 72-year-old man on the verge of blindness. And yet he refused to believe that he was beaten, he continued to hold out hope for a turn in his fortunes, he knew that he could still be useful to his country. To his secretaries, when he finally arrived, after a year of wanderings through the Algerian desert, in the village of Degache, in the Tunisian Jarid, he dictated the last page of his memoirs: "After the *mujahideen*

crossed the Algerian and Franco-Sudanese borders, in March 1930, the *jihad* came to an end in the oases of Fezzan; this was the final phase of the *jihad*, which had begun in 1921 and ended in 1930. In other words, the *jihad* lasted ten whole years: a period during which the *mujahideen* gave proof of unparalleled courage, praiseworthy patience, and the resistance and determination of true Muslims, who gave up their lives, their souls, and their money to fight in the name of God and to defend the honor of their fatherland."

And so, one period ended, but another was just beginning: "We are moving on to the next phase, which concerns events in Tunisia and in the East, what the *mujahideen* had done on the political stage to liberate their homeland and ensure its independence."[19] Until his death, which took place in 1950, Mohamed Fekini would have only two prevailing interests: that of upholding, with every form of struggle, the cause of Libyan independence and that of providing his children with the finest education available.

13

The Long Road of Exile

1. The forced exile across the Libyan-Algerian border, on the one hand, put an end to years of armed struggle, hunger, and desperation; on the other hand, however, it marked the beginning of a long period of extreme hardship, humiliation, poverty, and marches through new deserts, where people continued to die of thirst, hunger, and exposure. To give some idea of the complexity of the moves through Algerian and Tunisian territory, suffice it to say that the Fekini family would not end its odyssey until late 1932; that is, to say, nearly three years after they first crossed into Algeria.

For the years in exile, we rely predominantly upon the notes taken by Ali Nouredine Fekini and the poems he composed. He was very close to his father, whose intelligence, rigor, and undying love for his homeland he inherited; he would one day become the Libyan ambassador under King Idris to Tunisia, and he not only preserved his father's invaluable memoirs but, to a certain extent, continued them with his own writings. Here, for instance, is how he describes the beginning of the great exodus: "Some of the exiles moved toward the borders of Sudan, territories now known as Niger and Chad. Most of the refugees, however, headed towad the Saharan borders, at forts Tarat and Djanet. We were among those who crossed the eastern border of Algeria, at Wadi Tarat, in the military region of Azqer. The day that they crossed the frontier, Fort Tarat was manned by Algerian soldiers and Tuaregs, under the command of a French officer. They surrounded us and we laid down our weapons, except for my father, who was allowed to keep his. Later, they allowed the caravans of refugees to travel to the settlement of Illizi Boloniak, whose chief was a Tuareg, Ibrahim Bokadda. It was March 2, the holiday of Id al-Fitr, which marked the end of Ramadan. One of the border guards asked

us, 'Why did you run away?' " The answer is contained in the poem entitled *Oppression Is Intolerable*, which begins:

> *Oppression, O people,*
> *Forced me to abandon my homeland.*
> *Who leaves their homeland?*
> *Only he who fears unworthiness and injustice.*[1]

After a few weeks of rest, the vast crowd of refugees, divided into groups, left Illizi and in twelve legs of a long journey, arrived at Wadi Tahyaout, then El-hajjaj, and finally Amquid, to the north of the Hoggar. Here they were welcomed by Commander Karbi, chief of the southern region of Algeria, who, despite his best intentions, was incapable of offering acceptable accommodations for approximately 1,000 individuals who had brought no provisions, in a totally desert area devoid of water. Mohamed Fekini was obliged to telegraph the French governor general in Algiers to protest the inadequacy of their accommodations. And Fekini's intervention was both timely and helpful. The governor ordered Commander Karbi to provide the greatest possible assistance to the refugees, distributing them temporarily among the various oases.[2]

Shortly thereafter, the majority of the refugees set off again and, making the journey in a series of marches, reached the *zawiya* of Sidi Moussa, not far from Bordj Omar Driss. Here they remained at greater length, staying for a number of months while they made preparations for the epic journey to the far side of the Great Eastern Erg, a vast desert extending over several hundred kilometers, without a single villag, and only infrequent wells providing potable water (el Gassi, Belhirane). It would therefore be necessary to hire Tuareg guides, the only people capable of showing the Libyans the way to the wells and ensuring their survival. They would also need to stock up on dates—the basis of the nomad diet—easily preserved for long journeys. Finally, it would also be necessary to fill as many waterskins as possible; it was never possible to carry too much water on extended desert marches.

We do not know, with any precision, how many days it took to cross the sand sea of the Great Eastern Erg. We do know, from the accounts of three eyewitnesses,[3] that it was a hellish journey and that dozens of people met the same tragic fate as Abd en-Nebi Belcher and his 50 horsemen. After leaving the *zawiya* of Sidi Moussa, the huge caravan proceeded by marches toward Hassi Messaoud and

Ouargla. In order to traverse a region absolutely devoid of water, it was necessary to make a seven-day march, moving day and night. This was the worst part of the journey across the desert. The elderly and the sick were loaded onto camels, while the others went on foot; but many collapsed, on the verge of death. Mohamed Fekini's wife, Aicha, lavished great care on the weak and helpless. In a situation in which everyone was looking to their own survival, Aicha played a role of great humanity, and her sacrifice remained in the minds of one and all.

The exiles made their way through the desert, divided by tribe. Leading the march were the Rojeban and the Zintan. Following them were the Orfella, the Ulad Bu Sef, the Mesciascia, the Ulad Soliman, the Megarha, and the Kadafi. They finally reached the wells of el Gassi and Belhirane, where there was enough water for everyone, both humans and animals. Further along, the march grew easier, and they went through cities such as Hassi Messaoud and Ouargla—the latter city possessed one million palm trees. In Ouargla, the *mujahideen* stopped over for several months because the number of sick was too high for them to resume their march. Moreover, it was necessary to wait for the decisions of the French authorities concerning the refugees' final destination. In fact, Mohamed Fekini had traveled ahead of everyone else to Ouargla to negotiate with the authorities.

The Algerian government decided that the Libyans would be likely to find proper accommodations, and some of them would work in southern Tunisia. The march resumed in early 1931, with the following stopovers: Hassi Messaoud, Taibet, El Oued, and the Souf Valley. The exiles entered Tunisia on a line with the city of Nefta, the second-most important religious center in Tunisia, after Kairouan, warmly welcomed by the inhabitants and the mayor, *Khalifah* Sayyid al Amin.

"Subsequently, we proceeded to Tozeur, and then to Al Hamma in the region of Jerid," Ali Nouredine recalls. "Then we reached the mines of Metlaoui, where it was decided we should make a long stop so that a number of the stronger men could find work in the phosphate mines. A few months later, our family moved to Degache,[4] which was also in the Bled el-Jerid. We stayed there for some time, and then we moved on to Es Segui, in the Chott El Fejaj, with our Rojeban brothers and our herds of dromedaries, and it was here that we waited for the spring of 1932. My father, finally, decided to take up residence in the city of Gabes: that was at the end of 1932."[5]

2. From the time the mass of refugees entered Tunisia, Mohamed Fekini had appointed his son Ali Nouredine to supervise the accommodations of the exiles, while reserving to himself the task of establishing contact with the Tunisian and French authorities. As Ali Nouredine recalls, Fekini "left for Tunis to meet his old friend Taher Khair Ed-din Pasha, Minister of Justice and the son of the great politician and reformer Khair Eddin Pasha. In Tunis he also met Bey Ahmed, the prime minister, and the French resident general. He was also greeted warmly by the officials of the Destour political party in Tunis, Kairouan, Sfax, and Gabes."[6]

He also received warm and respectful greetings from Damascus, in Syria. On behalf of the executive committee of the community of emigrants from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Bashir el-Saadawi, the politician who had earned the sobriquet of "Libya's Mazzini," wrote him on November 1, 1930, to express his delight at the fact that he, "safe and sound," had reached Tunisia: "I thank Allah who has preserved from danger you, your family, and your children. We have done our duty in attempting to save the homeland from the claws of the colonialists, we have made every effort in the most honorable and courageous manner, but we have been obliged to abandon our homeland in order to continue our struggle in exile, exposed to all the suffering of exodus and emigration, just as our prophet left Mecca with his comrages in order to pursue his mission in Medina, and this offers us great consolation."[7] And he told him that, inasmuch as he could no longer serve his own country in battle, with weapons, he would now do so with the pen, writing for the press.

Mohamed Fekini found a sizable colony of refugees in Tunisia. A number of notables, such as Hassan Ben Gaber, one-time *kaymakam* of Zanzur, and Gariani ben Saidi, former *mudir* of the same city, had been obliged to flee Tripolitania as early as 1922. The most substantial group of exiles proved to be in Kairouan, where, at the intercession of the Beys of Tunis, they had been allowed to obtain lands and loans with which to begin various businesses and activities. A number of notables also taught in the Tunisian schools.[8] One of the first significant acts of the Libyan colony in Tunisia had been to ask Mohamed Fekini to take the position of secretary general of the Alliance of Mujahideen of North Africa, as a way of rewarding and commemorating the work of one of the most dedicated and courageous leaders of the Libyan resistance.

Still, homages and tributes, however pleasant they might be, were not enough. As he found himself approaching the age of 80, Fekini discovered to his anguish that he was no longer capable of supporting his own family or helping the poorest among the Rojeban. He had once been a very wealthy man, with homes and lands in Tripoli and on the Jebel. But when he crossed the border into Algeria, he brought with him assets totaling 16 dromedaries and the gold jewelry of his wife, Aicha. With the sale of these very limited resources, he had been able to survive in the early period, in Algeria and during the long journey toward Tunisia. Thereafter, he had received some assistance from his son Ali Nouredine, who was trading in agricultural products with certain notables in Ouargla.

But this total state of dependency must have galled a man who had always enjoyed great personal wealth, who had skillfully administered entire regions, and who had always been able to provide assistance to those most in need. As the months turned into years, and those years passed ineluctably, Fekini was obliged to ask for loans and subsidies. In 1933, as he himself stated in a petition to the Italian government, he had already chalked up debts to the tune of 50,000 francs.[9]

Since he could not tolerate this state of events much longer, and since he had spent and used up every source of livelihood or income available to him where he was, Mohamed Fekini played his last card: he decided to ask the Italian government to allow him to return to his native land and take possession of his own assets, which amounted to some three million lire, or so he claimed. With great reluctance, Fekini made this request on four separate occasions. In 1931, he wrote directly to Mussolini.[10] In 1933, he submitted a request to the government in Tripoli. In 1934, he sent a letter to the governor of Libya, Air Marshal Italo Balbo. In 1935, he wrote once again to Mussolini, with a very detailed list of his requests: they ranged from a general amnesty to the release of his own assets; the reconstruction of his own home, which had been destroyed by Graziani in the Jebel; and the payment to him of 200,000 francs in compensation for the debts he had contracted during his exile.[11]

The responses to Fekini's heartfelt requests were invariably negative, though the explanations and reasoning of those rejections varied. Badoglio was categorical. In a "private" note to the ministry for colonies, he wrote:

> It is not my intention to authorize the return to Tripolitania of the leading rebel chiefs of the movement in exile, that is: Hag Mohamed

> Figheni, [sic] Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen of the Misciascia, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, the Koobars, the Mraieds, the Sef en-Nasser, Saleh el-Ateusc, and Suleiman el-Baruni. . . . For that matter, I would point out that Mohamed Figheni's assets have been confiscated and his house at Taredja was destroyed during the reoccupation of the Jebel. Figheni, in his request, explicitly asks that his assets be restored to him, even though they have already been definitively and legally handed over to the state treasury. . . . It is well known that he is now living in poverty in Tunisia and that he must ask for loans and subsidies in order to live. If we were to allow him to return, we would be obligated to maintain him.[12]

Balbo, too, Badoglio's successor at the helm of the government of Libya, showed scanty generosity. In his reply to a note from the Minister for Colonies De Bono on the topic, he stated:

> I have no intention of modifying the political decisions taken by my predecessors toward those who were, like Fekini, the guilty parties of the period of the rebellion. Therefore, let Fekini nurture no illusions that I might be persuaded to revise the orders handed down by my predecessors in regard to the confiscation of the possessions of the former rebel leaders. If he wishes to come to spend the remaining years of his life in Tripolitania, I will keep the promise made by my predecessor not to demand retribution for his misdeeds; but I absolutely refuse to allow him to return to the Jebel where he committed his harmful acts. He would only be allowed to reside in the place that I have reserved for him, and that is, in Khoms, where I would arrange for him to receive a monthly check for 400 lire, sufficient for him to survive. I am unwilling to make any greater concessions than this.[13]

And when, one year later, Mohamed Fekini issued his appeal once again, Italo Balbo was even more hostile: "The old chief has preserved intact the mentality of 1919, that is, the period in which it was acceptable for native chieftains to negotiate with the government, and he believes that he can, in a decisive and authoritarian form, lodge demands that show nothing other than the extent of his effrontery. I have made no answer—nor shall I—to his request."[14] With this letter, Balbo closed for good the Italian side of the quarrel with Mohamed Fekini. The old Rojeban chieftain also stopped lodging demands, reiterating his argument and upholding his rights, and reminding the Italian authorities that France had behaved quite differently with "Emir Abdel Kader and his ministero Sheik El Okbi, and with Hag Mohammed ben Khalifa el Naffati

in Tunisia, pardoning them both and welcoming them back in a most humane manner."[15] Though belatedly, Fekini realized that he had made an unforgivable error by turning to his long-time enemy and confiding in that enemy's generosity.[16] Still, to a certain degree, Balbo was right: Fekini could not manage to escape the spell of the Fundamental Law, in which he had believed and for which he had fought.

3. The years from 1931 to 1937 were certainly the worst for the Fekini family. Perhaps they were even more difficult and unhappy than the years they had spent in Ghibla and Fezzan. It is true that, in Tunisia, Fekini was no longer obliged to fight the Italians, and he could reestablish contact with the various exiles scattered around the world. But his poverty humiliated the aged leader, forcing him to move in continuation, from Nefta to Metlaoui, from Degache to Es Segui, from Gabes to Kebili, and then once again to Gabes. In the modest little house in Gabes, in the quarter of Sidi Boulbaba, where the Fekini family lived from 1932 to 1937, the elderly patriarch watched as his own daughter Oufaya and his grandchildren Salma, Fatima, Hassan, and Boulbaba, died of hunger and disease.

Now approaching 80, Mohamed Fekini spent a considerable part of the day in the little courtyard of his home, wrapped in his white *holi*; with him sat his wife Aicha Nouir or one or another of his surviving children. He rarely left the house, even though Gabes, the ancient *Tacapae* mentioned by Pliny the Elder, was and remains a splendid city with a vast palm grove that extends almost to the waves of the Mediterranean Sea. One of his favorite destinations was the mosque of Sidi Boulbaba, where he was able to pray on the tomb of the Prophet Mohammed's friend. He spent part of every day reading newspapers, despite his deteriorating vision and taking care of his correspondence: writing and receiving letters from his old fellow fighters, such as Bashir el-Saadawi, Ahmed Sef en-Nasser, Abdel Gelil Sef en-Nasser, Ahmed el-Mraied, Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, who were scattered all over the map—in Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Algeria, and Chad.

From this intense correspondence, copies of which, amazingly enough, have survived to the present day, we learn that on February 17, 1938 Fekini also wrote a letter to the president of the Turkish Republic, Atatürk. Reminding him that he had made considerable efforts "in the interests of the Turkish state, with sincerity and constancy, with no negligence or lapse in loyalty," Fekini informed the

great statesman that the pension that had been agreed upon with Rajab Pasha had been paid to him only for a few months. "If the pension system is no longer in effect," Fekini continued, "I beg you, Excellency, for a gift from your state, to help us survive in this difficult situation in our exile."[17] But, as we learn from a letter from Fekini to Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, Atatürk died a few weeks after that, and there was no further mention of either pension or gift.[18]

Despite the poverty, the disappointments, and the humiliations, Fekini did not allow his spirits to flag. In a letter addressed to Mohammed Safi ed-Din es-Senusi, who lived in Marsa Matruk, Egypt, he confided that his love for his far-off homeland had remained intact: "Despite everything, the exiles among our people are still in contact and maintain good relations during their exile. We preserve solid ties with our brothers scattered all over the map, in order to preserve a solid patriotic unity. This is the duty of all the heads of the partisan movement, of free men and young people active in the sphere of the struggle for the liberation of our homeland."[19]

Thus, Fekini relied implicitly on the patriotic unity of the exiles, which would inevitably result, when the time was ripe, in a war of liberation. He counted on it—perhaps, in a state of desperation, because from reading the newspapers he gathered only disheartening and melancholy news. In November 1938, for instance, he learned that 20,000 Italian colonists had landed in Tripoli and had taken possession of the finest lands in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.[20] But the news that truly threw him into a tailspin was a report about the Berber Yusuf Cherbisc, his long-time protégé, who had subsequently placed himself in the service of the Italians. On March 18, 1937, on the occasion of a visit to Libya by Mussolini, Cherbisc had handed to the Duce, in the clearing of Bugara, the sword of Islam with the following words: "In the name of the soldiers and Muslims of Libya, who proud are to consider themselves sons of Fascist Italy, I have the honor of offering to you, O victorious Duce, this well tempered Islamic sword. The hearts of Muslims on all the shores of the Mediterranean beat in time with ours, in this moment, filled with admiration and hope, and they see in you the Great Statesman who is guiding, with a firm hand, our destiny."[21]

Behold, Fekini must certainly have thought inwardly, as he read Cherbisc's shameless and baseless tribute to Mussolini, where treason can take a person, look at what total subjugation to the occupation forces can do to a man. Fekini knew Cherbisc very well; he knew that

his treason had been motivated by money. And he had received plenty of money. In just a few years, he had become the wealthiest man in Tripoli, perhaps in all of Libya.

4. In 1937, Mohamed Fekini moved with his family to Kebili, in Jebel Tebaga, 120 kilometers (65 miles) from Gabes, where his son Lamine had found work as a guard in a French barracks. Ali Nouredine, instead, remained behind in Gabes, where his trade in farm products was beginning to prosper.

For the Fekini family, then, the worst period in economic terms, seemed to have passed. The years of a piercing bewilderment, triggered by the sufferings they had undergone during the flight out of Fezzan and the long march over the Algerian deserts, had also come to an end. Things were changing as well on the political front. Italy had bled itself dry in the conquest of Ethiopia and in its involvement in the war in Spain, and now it was making its supreme error with its alliance with Hitler's Nazi German. France and Great Britain, on their part, had finally awoken from a long slumber and were feverishly rearming in order to stand up to the Axis nations in a situation that seemed inevitably to lead to war.

On October 18, 1939, a few weeks after the outbreak of the Second World War, the leaders of the Libyan community in Egypt gathered in Alexandria in the home that had been made available to them by the emir Mohammed Idris al-Senussi. During a meeting that lasted for five days, the 40 chieftains agreed unanimously to join the Democratic Peace Front and elected, as their representative, the emir Idris al-Senussi.[22] All Libyans living in exile were informed of these decisions. And immediately thereafter, those same exiled Libyans were sent documents that already discussed a "war program"[23] and a "Pact," in 12 articles, on the "national rights of the Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican people."[24]

The day of redemption, so long awaited, had finally arrived, and Mohamed Fekini once again felt ready to fight. In a letter addressed to the Libyan notables who lived in Egypt, Fekini wrote, among other things: "We are very satisfied with the work that you have done in Egypt on behalf of unity and solidarity. We expect that the collaboration between the British and French in the Democratic Front will give us an opportunity, in a not very distant future, to resume the holy war against Italy, and that it will also give us an opportunity to regain the liberty of our country. Here, all the exiles in Tunisia are ready to resume the armed struggle."[25]

Fekini, in any case, was not the sort to wait for instructions from Egypt to go to war. There are two documents that attest that he and his son Ali Nouredine had already launched military initiatives from the very first days of the Second World War. On October 19, 1939, Captain Youri wrote to the "honorable and esteemed Hajj Mohamed Bey Fekini" to congratulate him for having displayed "sublime and loyal sentiments of gratitude" toward Tunisia which "had welcomed him as a son." Once the courteous preamble was over, Captain Youri begged him, however, "not to undertake anything or to risk anything before consulting with us, and not to act against our plans and our intentions."[26]

The second document is even more explicit and revealing. It states:

> The undersigned, Professor E. Lévi-Provençal, attests that in 1939–40, in his position as assistant to the head of the political office in the North African theater of operations, he was able to observe the actual participation of Ali Nouredine, at his father Hajj Mohamed Fekini's side, in southern Tunisia, in the war effort provided by contingents enrolled from among the Tripolitanian exiles of Tunisia and integrated into the armed forces during the early phase of the last World War.[27]

We can obviously exclude the possibility that Mohamed Fekini, more than 80 years old and nearly blind, took part in any military operations, but certainly he brought to bear all his prestige and authority to urge the Tripolitanian exiles to enroll in the French army; and he is likely to have made use of his perfect knowledge of the territories of Tripolitania and Fezzan to identify specific objectives. Ali Nouredine, on the other hand, certainly took part in military operations, since General Leclerc, the conqueror of Kufra and Fezzan, sent him a photograph depicting him reviewing the French forces and the *mujahideen* of Ahmed Sef en-Nasser[28] beneath the walls of the *gahra* of Sebha, dedicating it: "To Si Fekini Ali Nouri Bey, in commemoration of a meeting between two soldiers."[29]

5. On January 23, 1943, at 5 a.m., the leading contingents of the British Eighth Army, under the command of General Montgomery, entered Tripoli, putting an end—after nearly 32 years—to Italian rule over Libya. For the Fekini family, however, the liberation of Tripoli did not mean a return to tranquility because the war moved from Libya to Tunisia, forcing them to abandon Kebili in haste; in fact,

the city was at the center of the clash between the Axis forces (the German Fifth Army under General von Arnim and the German First Army under General Messe) and the Anglo-Franco-American forces (Eighth Army under General Montgomery and American Second Army Corps). Combat raged furiously along the Mareth el-Hamma line, in the Chotts, and finally at Enfidaville. On May 11, 1943 all resistance by Axis troops came to an end, and a ceasefire was called in Africa.

In early May, the Fekini family was already able to return to Kebili, and on May 10, Mohamed Fekini wrote to the emir Idris al-Senussi to express his satisfaction with the victorious conclusion of the war in North Africa. "We have the greatest respect for all that Great Britain has done," he wrote. "We thank you for the efforts that you have expended to save our country and to free it from Italian domination. We believe that our country, with your help, can enter a new era of freedom and prosperity. All the exile in Tunisia rejoice over the Allied victory and express all their devotion to you, along with their most sincere regards."[30]

The answer from emir Mohammed Idris al-Senussi reached Fekini in November 1943. The future king of Libya thanked the chieftain of the Rojeban for his congratulations "concerning the victory and great triumph of our allies against our enemies, who are also the enemies of all humanity." The emir also added: "We salute all the exiles who are with you and we urge them to remain united and ready to respond to the appeal of their country, to come to its service in a new era based on liberty, merit, and the law."[31]

In the month of October 1944, Mohamed Fekini and his son Ali Nouredine decided to return to Libya for a brief stay. They had not been in their homeland for 14 years, and they had not set foot on Rojeban land in 22 years. Their visit to their house in Taredia, rather than causing any feelings of joy in either man, filled them with an unspeakable sadness. The large house was virtually reduced to rubble. The bombs tossed out of Graziani's airplanes had not been enough. The house had also been subjected to a complete and devastating plundering. Part of the stones and other construction material had been utilized by the Italians to build the *moudiriah*, the administrative center of Taredia. But what cut deepest was the discovery on one of the walls that still stood of bullet holes from the execution of a number of *mujahideen* who had been taken prisoner. All that remained alive, in this pile of stones and plaster, was a tree that stood near the main entrance.

To assuage, in part, the anguish caused by this horrifying sight, Fekini received on October 25 an invitation to attend a party held in his honor by the Tripoli Literary Club, founded in 1919, at the time of the Italian concession to the Libyans of the Statute (only to be suppressed, later, also by the Italians).[32] On the evening of October 26, in a hall crowded with Libyans and foreigners, the president of the Literary Club, Abdel Rahman Ibrahim Damdam, greeted Fekini with these words: "We are assembled here today to pay tribute to our great leader Hajj Mohamed Bey Fekini. This leader, his brothers, and his followers have all sacrificed everything they owned on behalf of their homeland, and they have chosen exile rather than submit to the injustices of the Fascist despots."[33]

Deeply moved by this and other solemn speeches, Mohamed Fekini thanked those who had attended the ceremony and "all those who so warmly welcomed us in all those places we passed through" and added, among other things: "From the very beginning, we opposed this Italian enemy, who has committed too many atrocities and who has laid far too many plots. But Allah was on our side . . . Now the hour of revenge has arrived. With the help of our ally, Great Britian, we shall succeed in expelling the Fascistic and despotic colonialists. We also hope that Great Britain will support us in building our future. We are also grateful toward our second ally, democratic France. It has helped us greatly during the most difficult years of our exile in Tunisia." Fekini concluded his speech with the following words: "Now our plan is unify everyone and find mutual support so that it will be possible to act together in the general interest, as well as solid cooperation with the government that has saved this country."[34]

Welcomed as a national hero by the Libyans, Fekini was ,however, not at all welcome to the authorities of the British Military Administration, who rejected his request to renew his residence permit. The aged Rojeban chieftain had no difficulty understanding the reasons for this appalling measure. It was enough to consider the individuals that the chief UN administrator, Brigadier General Travers Robert Blackley, had invited to join the Advisory Council that he himself chaired. Among them were the Mufti of Tripoli, Salem el-Muntasser, and Mustafa Mizran, that is, the very same conservative and grasping notables who had truckled and obeyed Italy.

After a month spent in Tripoli and Taredia, Fekini and his son returned, disappointed and embittered, to Tunisia. The times were not yet ready for a permanent return to Libya, and Fekini, after living for a while in Kebili, in 1946 moved with his family to Gabes,

where Ali Nouredine was successful and prosperous and had even purchased a luxurious Citroën, one of the first cars the city had ever seen. This time, the Fekinis went to live in the quarter of the Grand Jarra, the most comfortable in the city. He would never move again. His long journey in exile had reached its destination.

6. The war was over, the Italians had been beaten and expelled from the "fourth shore," but the future of Libya remained in shadow. The first political parties[35] would not be formed until the first half of 1946, since the British Military Administration had not yet issued authorizations. As soon as they came into being, though, they immediately revealed all the age-old shortcomings of all Libyan political organizations. As Salaheddin Hasan Sury justly observed, "They were led by notables and failed to prepare any well defined political programs, nor did they have clear plans of action; instead they wasted their potential energy in squabbling, rivalries, disagreements, and personal conflicts, which only caused them to fragment further, resulting in the formation of new parties."[36]

Out of the confused and muddled programs of the first Libyan political parties there emerged, all the same, three basic decisions: 1) acceptance of the emir Mohammed Idris al-Senussi as king of a unified Libya; 2) consensus for a foreign "mandate" over Tripolitania, while awaiting full independence; and 3) the creation of a democratic constitutional republic, which could hold united Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. The option that seemed to win the greatest general support was the first, and not so much because the people of Tripolitania loved the Grand Senussi in any feverish manner but rather because they believed (and they were not mistaken) that the manifest British protection that Mohammed Idris enjoyed might be the sole key to winning, in a reasonable period of time, Libyan independence.[37]

For Mohamed Fekini, who had always had ties to the Senussi brotherhood, the choice of Mohammed Idris as king of a unified Libya was unquestionable. As we have seen, Fekini had corresponded regularly with the emir and with Safi ed-Din since 1936, and now the idea of actively working to assure that Idris gained the throne gave him a burst of surprising energy. As secretary general of the League of Libyan Former *Mujahideen* stationed in Tunisia and Algeria, Fekini had enormous influence. Just as he had succeeded in 1939–1940 in bringing about the enlistment of hundreds of Tripolitanian and Fezzanese exiles in the French armed forces, six years later, he was quite certain that he could secure for the Grand Senussi the total

support of the Libyans scattered throughout the Maghreb. Fekini also was acting in collaboration with Ahmed Sef en-Nasser, with whom he had maintained relations ever since Ahmed, who had taken refuge with his *mujahideen* at Fort Lamy, Chad, had undertaken, alongside General Leclerc, the reconquest of Fezzan, thereafter becoming the region's governor.

But Fekini did not limit his activity to gathering support for the appointment of the future sovereign. He was also working to prevent an independent Libya from coming into the world badly, for instance, with Italian claims on its future, considering the frantic maneuvers that Rome was making to obtain a UN mandate over Tripolitania. On May 25, 1945, Fekini sent a telegram to the French government with a series of proposals and requests, which he then reiterated on 3 September 3 of that same year to General Mast, governor of Tunisia. Considering the fact that the Allies, at war's end, were examining the problems affecting a great many states, with a view of establishing a new world order, Fekini forwarded the following proposals: 1) self-determination for Libyans through an agreement between the leaders in exile and their colleagues inside the country. The selection of political regime was also to be made in close collaboration and should be based on the friendship and assistance of allied states; 2) the expulsion of the Italians, duly stripped of the lands and everything else that they had plundered and stolen illegally. Restitution of these assets to their rightful owners or else to the Libyan state; 3) restoration of all political and civil rights to those leaders who opposed the Fascist regime from 1922 up to the Second World War; and 4) the expulsion of all Italians and their collaborators from all positions and offices. Total abolition of all the laws and systems that the Italians had put into place.[38]

The activism of Fekini and his son Ali Nouredine did not escape the notice of Mohammed Idris, who had in the meanwhile left Cairo and taken up residence in Benghazi, where, on June 1, 1949, in agreement with London, he had proclaimed the independence of Cyrenaica. The Grand Senussi, of course, was planning to become king of a unified Libya, and in that context the contributions made by the Fekinis to the achievement of this plan appeared significant and useful. It was certainly to thank him for a loyalty that dated back decades by now and to ask him for his help that Mohammed Idris traveled to Gabes, Tunisia, to meet with the chief of the Rojeban. On this journey, which had been given no publicity, the Grand Senussi was accompanied by his prime vizier, Ibrahim esh-Shalhi.

The meeting took place in Mohamed Fekini's modest home on an autumn evening in 1949. "The meeting between the monarch and my father-in-law lasted for about an hour," Ali Nouredine's wife recalls, "then we all went into my husband's offices, where a few women made dinner. Mohamed Fekini had recently turned ninety-two and he was very lucid. The meeting with the king made him very happy."[39] The presence of the monarch, the monarch's evident respect for him, the high consideration that the king showed for his constant loyalty, paid him back for all the sacrifices, the bitterness, and the sorrows that had afflicted him. "That," adds Ali Nouredine's wife, "was certainly his happiest day since he had entered Tunisia in 1931."[40]

The unexpected visit of Mohammed Idris to Gabes was a refreshing development for Fekini, but its bracing effect was soon to vanish because the news that was arriving from Tripoli was anything but encouraging. While Italy was making the last few efforts to obtain a mandate over Tripolitania, the Libyan political parties continued to offer a depressing spectacle with their disagreements and quarrels. On March 1, 1950, Mohamed Fekini sent a long letter to his old friend Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, who had become in the meantime the secretary general of the Arab League. With great honesty and sincerity, he informed him of his own fears and anxieties, speaking also in the name of his son Ali Nouredine: "We are very aggrieved at the political situation of our country. We are afraid of the nasty surprises that could well be caused by those who are trying to stir up disagreements. The political parties, founded by cunning and dishonest individuals, have no other aims than to attain private interests. . . . We have remained in exile and we are deeply opposed to all these manipulations." He asked him, therefore, to come personally to Tripoli "in order to help our people, who respect you greatly, to find solutions to their own problems, and to warn them against the lies foisted on them by the many corruptors."[41]

This is the last letter that Mohamed Fekini wrote, probably with the assistance of his son Ali Nouredine, since it also bears his signature. Twenty-eight days later, the great Libyan patriot breathed his last in his house in the Jarra quarter. He was exactly 92 years, 7 months, and 5 days old. He died in exile.

At his own express request, but also at the wishes of the entire populace of Gabes, Mohamed Fekini was buried next to the tomb of Sidi Abi Boulbaba al Ansari in the cemetery of that name. On the occasion of his death, many newspapers published commemorations of his life and role, placing emphasis on his exceptional rigor and the

crucial role that he had played in the Libyan armed struggle against Italy. The newspaper *Tunisie* published a lengthy article about him, including little-known facts about his life such as his ties with Omar al-Mukhtar, the renowned resistance leader in Cyrenaica who was hanged at Graziani's orders in Solug. The article ended with the following words:

> He gave everything he had for his homeland, his efforts, his possessions, his money, and the lives of his sons. He was found guilty and sentenced in absentia; they confiscated everything he owned; they razed his homes out of spite and vendetta. Nonetheless, none of that weakened his will or made him give up the fight. On the contrary, he proved to be even more courageous. All the documents, the letters, and the materials in the archives provide evidence of the sacrifices he made and his utter loyalty to his homeland and his fellow citizens, throughout his entire life.[42]

In this tribute, composed by an elderly *mujahideen* who had always been at his side, there is not one word too many. Not a single rhetorical flourish or conventional fillip. This is an authentic portrait of a man who spent his life well, prompted by an elevated sense of honor and justice.

14

Let Us Restore Their Dignity

1. Everyone had gathered around the body of Mohamed Fekini. They were all there: his wife, Aicha Nouir, who had performed the ceremony of closing his eyelids. His eldest son and his successor in politics, Ali Nouredine. Lamine, who worked for the French army in Kebili. Mohieddine, who lived in Paris and was about to take a degree in law from the Sorbonne. And Mariam, who was born on the Jebel, before the war broke out again. And finally, Manoubia Ben Hamida, Ali Nouredine's second wife, who watched over the house like a guardian angel.[1]

Fekini's death opened an irreparable void. Even though he had handed over to his sons, some time before, many of his responsibilities (especially to Ali Nouredine), his advice and his teachings were always welcome and expected. It was also an edifying lesson to listen to the fervor and accuracy with which he cited verses from the Koran and the *hadith* (sayings) and the *sunnah* (deeds) of the Prophet. With the passing of the years, his wisdom had become intertwined with a growing religious ardor, so that to his relatives and to many others, the figure of Mohamed Fekini seemed to possess all the blessings of sainthood. Often, the family patriarch would recite the *sura* that says: "Permission is given to those who fight because they have been wronged, and, verily, God to help them has the might, who have been driven forth from their homes undeservedly, only for that they said, 'Our Lord is God.'"[2] Even on his deathbed, Mohamed Fekini could not forget the wrongs that had been done to him by the Italians, and he could not forgive them, as God was his witness.

In Tripolitania, in the meanwhile, the appointment of Mohammed Idris as ruler of a unified Libya was meeting with harsh opposition. Salem el Muntasser confidentially informed the Italian consul

Roberto Gaja that he intended to launch immediately a propaganda campaign against the Grand Senussi and the decision to establish a monarchy.[3] The Berber peoples of the Jebel and the Zuara region also rejected the idea of unifying Libya under the Senussi crown, and in a secret assembly held not far outside of Tripoli, they decided "to join forces to oppose the extension of the Senussi emirate to include Tripolitania."[4]

There was not a moment to lose. Convinced, as his father had been, that Mohammed Idris alone could assure Libya of a future of peace and prosperity, Ali Nouredine immediately set to work, in collaboration with Ahmed Sef en-Nasser, to restore the fortunes of the Grand Senussi. The first step they took was to arrange a meeting in Tunis with Adrian Pelt (a Dutchman who was assistant secretary-general of the UN, as the UN commissioner in Libya—*translator's note*) who had been appointed by the UN General Assembly to shepherd Libya toward independence. The two Libyan leaders pointed out to Pelt the particular situation of the Libyan exiles in North Africa and "the importance of their effective participation in the country's development, precisely because they played the most important role in the defense of Tripolitania." They also explicitly informed the UN commissioner that they rejected the idea of any foreign presence, especially an Italian one, in the soon-to-be established Libyan institutions of government, such as the Council of Ten and the Committee of Twenty-One.[5]

In his responsibility as secretary general of the League of Libyan Former *Mujahideen*, an office that he had inherited from his father, Ali Nouredine met in Gabes with the two Libyan delegates, Mustafa Mizran and Ali Assad el-Gerbi, who were traveling to Geneva to make a presentation on the Libyan situation to the UN Advisory Council. He reiterated to them the demands of the *mujahideen* in exile and emphasized his strong rejection of the presence of any foreigners in Libyan institutions. Even then he was not satisfied, and he himself traveled to Paris on various occasions to make the point that a Libyan state could only come into being as a unified nation without any foreign interference.

At midnight on December 23, 1951, the document transferring power from Great Britain and France to the United Kingdom of Libya was signed simultaneously in Benghazi, Tripoli, and Sebha. A few hours later, on the morning of December 24, in the great hall of the el Manerah Palace in Benghazi, King Idris proclaimed his country's independence. In his brief address, Mohammed Idris pledged to

respect and defend the Constitution, and then he cast his thoughts back to the past, to the harsh and cruel days of the anticolonial struggle, to the tens of thousands of fallen *mujahideen*, and declared: "In this blessed moment, we should remember the heroes of our past. We invoke the dew of divine mercy and reward for the souls of our blessed martyrs, and we salute the sacred banner, the heritage of our forefathers, and the long yearned-for symbol of our unity, in the hope that the new era now beginning will be for our nation a time of prosperity and peace."[6]

A few months before King Idris proclaimed the independence of Libya, Ali Nouredine Fekini had tried to travel to Tripoli, but the British authorities had refused to give him a visa. For the Fekinis, therefore, a police order was still in effect that was not only unjustified but also highly offensive. Ali Nouredine could return to his homeland only after the proclamation of independence. King Idris, however, did not see eye to eye with Brigadier General Travers Robert Blackley and, mindful of the staunch support that the Fekini family had offered to his candidacy as king of a united Libya, he helped Ali Nouredine to begin a diplomatic career. In view of the fact, finally, that Ali still had considerable influence in Tunisia and was a personal friend of the president of the republic Habib Bourguiba, he posted him to Tunis in 1959 as Libyan ambassador. Fekini continued in that office until 1965, when, as a result of a disagreement with the king over Idris's excessively conservative policies and the questionable individuals with whom he had surrounded himself, Fekini was asked to resign.

2. Up to this point, we have always seen Ali Nouredine in his role as a successful businessman and as a diplomat. But there is a third and every bit as respected Ali Nouredine who writes poetry, who has documented his entire life with concise and memorable verses. His poetic oeuvre can be divided into four parts, which concern four periods of his life: the "poems of Fezzan," composed during the *jihad* in Ghibla and Fezzan; the "Algerian poems," written in Algeria during the crossing of the desert and the temporary exile in that country; the "Tunisian poems," composed during the long exile in Tunisia; and the "Tripolitanian poems," composed after the liberation of Libya and his return to his homeland.

In his introduction to the book in verse, *Memories of Resistance and Exile*, the editor, Zahi al-Qaid, writes: "Dear Reader, the book that you hold in your hands is not merely a collection of poems, it is

also a collection of struggles and opposition, it is the heroic saga of an entire people. And the author is not merely a poet, he is also a resistance fighter.... Ali was an adolescent youth at the beginning of the *jihad*, but before long he was a fighter in the ranks of the resistance, sword in one hand, pen in the other."[7] According to Zahi al-Qaid, the meter that Ali Nouredine utilized is often that of classical poetry, and the

> vocabulary and imagery are taken from the harsh desert landscape, with its desolate ruins, its empty deserts, its lethal valleys, as if the deserts of the Arabian Maghreb contained those of the Arabic Peninsula, their barren landscapes and their mirages, their horses and dromedaries, birds and beasts.... And so it comes as no surprise to learn that his poetry contains, from start to finish, the characteristics of an authentic Arabic heritage. And so they might begin or end with religious verses, under the auspices of the Prophet Mohammed.[8]

Here, for instance, is how Ali Nouredine commemorates his sister Aicha, who died of malaria in Diyya, on the outskirts of Ubari, during the years of the armed struggled in the valley of Shati:

In Fezzan, she rests today,
After a long period of suffering and grief.
She suffered the agony of fever
With the same patience as the first comrades.[9]
And Diyya, in the valley of death,
Its vast landscape and the domes hiccoughing.
Because though the water is pure and sweet
Mosquitoes and flies torment those there.
To remember Ubari brings me sadness:
Aicha still lies there, hostage of the earth.[10]

The *jihad* in the Fezzan desert is one of the themes that Ali Nouredine treats with special vigor, at times with anger, almost as if trying to free himself of an intolerable affliction:

In Fezzan we fought back the attack,
Striking at every aggressor, from whichever direction they came.
We fought them with firmness,
Using our rifles and spears.
Italians, you attacked us horribly,
Usurping and violating....
You came into our homeland

Expecting that we would live as slaves.
My God, we shall never accept slavery,
And we do not fear the threat of murder.[11]

But Ali Nouredine uses the same vehemence to scold King Idris, who had surrounded himself with corrupt courtiers in the final years of his rule and held all power, along with the Royal Divan and a few conservative notables. Ali Nouredine was not along in his dissatisfaction with the regime; his views were shared by students, union organizers, the members of the old parties, now powerless, the followers of the new pan-Arabic movements, and even army officers, especially the lower ranks. On May 7, 1969, four months prior to Gheddafi's revolution, Ali Nouredine sent Crown Prince and Heir Apparent Hassan er-Ridà a copy of a poem entitled *The Catastrophe* and asked him to give it to King Idris.

In the poem, which consists of 84 verses, Ali Nouredine alternates praise for the king with peremptory demands and horrifying accusations:

O King, our great hope,
You are, in our quandary, our last and best hope.

But immediately after this laudatory beginning, the poet introduces a criticism and an incitement:

The country is awaiting a serious political approach
Based on firmness, which never wavers.[12]

And he goes on:

Save your country from the corrupt and from impostors
Ensure that they vanish into the den of cowardice.
Let Allah guide you and take care of our people,
Let him give you firmness and success
For a long dreamed of reform.[13]

On September 1, 1969, Operation Jerusalem was triggered, and the little-known Captain Muammar Gheddafi announced the success of the coup d'état over Radio Benghazi, with the following words: "In the name of Allah, the compassionate and the merciful, O great Libyan people! To achieve your free will, to attain your precious aspirations, to respond to your repeated demands for change and purification,

hard work and initiative, and in the spirit of revolution and assulat, your armed forces have destroyed the reactionary, retrograde, and decadent regime.... From now on, Libya will be considered a free and sovereign republic, and will bear the name of Libyan Arab Republic, and with the help of Allah, will ascend to the highest spheres."[14]

Considering the criticisms that Ali Nouredine Fekini had made against King Idris, contained both in the poem *The Catastrophe* but also in other public documents, one might reasonably have expected that he would have garnered considerable benefits from Gheddafi's revolution. Instead, he was immediately expelled from the diplomatic service, along with other ambassadors and—an almost comic sidelight—on charges of having maintained close relations with the Senussi monarch. On October 10, 1971, Ali Nouredine sent a letter to the Executive Committee of the Revolution, refuting, point by point, all the charges that had been leveled against him and requesting to be accepted back into the Libyan diplomatic corps.[15] But his request was rejected. Even with the revolution, the Fekinis were unfortunate.

3. While for Mohamed Fekini, his son Ali Nouredine represented a providential success in business and a perfect alignment in terms of political objectives, both in peace and in war, his other son, Mohieddine, born in Shati during the years of the armed struggle, constituted a complete success in the field of academic studies. After completing his primary studies in Gabes, he had attended high school in Tunis, graduating with the highest possible grades and winning a scholarship to continue his studies in Paris. After taking a degree in law at the Sorbonne, he completed other graduate studies and returned to his homeland in 1952 to join the diplomatic corps. At the age of 30, he was minister of justice in the Tripolitania government; at 32, he was ambassador to Cairo; at 34, he represented Libya in Washington and at the United Nations; and at 38, he was summoned back to Tripoli by King Idris who entrusted him with the responsibility for assembling the sixth cabinet of the Libyan government, the first cabinet since Libya joined OPEC.

As Mohamed Yusuf al-Mugarieff wrote in his monumental political history of Libya, Mohieddine Fekini was "respected for his loyalty and honesty, and was likewise renowned for his seriousness of purpose and capacity for hard work, as well as for his wealth of experience in the worlds of economics and diplomacy. He was well known for his nationalistic and patriotic positions, he had progressive attitudes, he supported national liberation movements, and he had excellent

relations in Africa."[16] It was the beginning of 1963. Realizing that it was no longer possible to ignore the calls for change coming from every walk of life, King Idris triggered a government crisis on March 19, entrusting the office of prime minister to the young Mohieddine Fekini. With him, a number of young technocrats formed part of the executive branch for the first time, holding cabinet positions for the economic ministries, and they attempted to implement the newly passed Five Year Plan—Libya's first Five Year Plan—with the aim of bringing about a rapid change in Libya's general quality of life, by supporting and encouraging agriculture, improving public education, and promoting industrial development.

For a few months, thanks to his energetic governing style and his openness to new ideas, Mohieddine Fekini was viewed by the young people and the more progressive sectors of society as the right man, the man they had been waiting for, the man of destiny. And he certainly had a number of fine qualities. He belonged to a respected and patriotic family. He had spent long years in exile. He knew how to win over the masses with his eloquence, his extraordinary learning, and the charm that he emanated. His speeches, filled with nationalistic and populist themes, were reminiscent of the speeches of Nasser. Unfortunately, he was head of government for far too short a time, just ten months. That was, nonetheless, long enough for him to promise land reform for the *fellahin*; to increase salaries by a few piastres; to give women the right to vote in general elections, with the modification of article 102 of the Constitution; to expand the role of the press and the media; to suppress federalism and proclaim the national unity of Libya; to be given a state reception at John F. Kennedy's White House; and finally, to quicken the pulse of young students who believed in a Libyan republic by making a few well-chosen allusions.

Mohieddine Fekini streaked across the clear blue Libyan sky like a meteor, so much so that the historian Salaheddin Hasan Sury had this to say about his downfall:

> He had embarked on a grand and ambitious program of reforms, but soon he was overwhelmed by excessive expectations and modest achievements, caught between Nasserian chauvinism and the indifferent heart of the regime, between his own growing popularity and the jealousy of his colleagues.[17]

One remarkable element is that it was his own supporters who struck the fatal blow, however unaware they may have been of the fact at

the time. On January 13, 1964, while an Arab summit meeting was being held in Cairo against Israel, groups of students from the universities of Benghazi and Tripoli filled the streets with two specific aims: to push the Libyan monarchy to manifest its full solidarity with the policy of Arabic unity and to emphasize their complete support of Fekini's progressive policies.

With their reckless protest and the subsequent clashes with the police that resulted in a number of deaths, the students offered the conservative sector of Libyan society an ideal opportunity to put pressure on King Idris to put a halt to the reform policies that had been inaugurated by Mohieddine Fekini. The officer responsible for issuing the order to fire on the students was General Mahmoud Bu Queitin, chief of the national guard of Cyrenaica and a fierce opponent of Fekini's progressive policies. Once the prime minister established, through a commission of inquiry, that the general and five of his officers had been at fault in the bloody clashes, he asked King Idris to suspend the general immediately from duty until he could be tried properly. King Idris, however, refused to take that measure and obliged Mohieddine Fekini to tender his resignation on January 22.[18] The Egyptian historian Sami Hakim, in a careful and thorough reconstruction of events, has pointed out that Fekini wrote a carefully "argued letter of resignation," an unparalleled move in Libyan history.[19] Even in his last public act, Fekini was determined to convey an image of clarity, legality, and consistency.

"On 1 September 1969, Mohieddine was in Paris with his family," his nephew Anwar Fekini recalls. "Immediately after the announcement of the Libyan coup, Mohieddine sent a telegram expressing his solidarity with the new government. And in his role as a respected politician, he made some initial contacts with the governments of France, Great Britain, and the United States to encourage them to recognize the new Libyan regime. Unfortunately the government of the young officers reacted in an entirely unexpected and unreasonable manner, ordering the army to occupy Mohieddine's farm, where the former prime minister maintained his residence."[20]

Mohieddine Fekini returned ten months later to Tripoli, after receiving assurances of his safety, and resumed his practice as a lawyer. When, in 1978, Gheddafi forbade the free practice of professions, he gave up all public activity and focused on his farm, 14 hectares (35 acres) of orange groves in the Tripoli oasis.

"In 1987," Anwar Fekini further recalls, "Gheddafi, for the first time, invited Mohieddine and Ali Nouredine Fekini to his home. The

reason for the invitation was quite clear. Gheddafi wanted to urge the two brothers to do whatever they could to improve relations with the Tunisian President Bourguiba, with whom Tripoli was feuding constantly. Gheddafi knew that the two brothers had maintained excellent relations with him since the Forties, when they both lived in exile in Tunisia."[21] Subsequently, Gheddafi met the two brothers repeatedly, once even at dinner, in 1988. Still, he continued to maintain a chilly and suspicious attitude toward them, probably because of the great popularity that they both continued to enjoy in Libya. It should be stated, however, that after Mohieddine Fekini's death, Gheddafi sent one of the surviving members of the Revolutionary Command Council, Mustapha al-Kharrubi, as his representative at the funeral. Another member of the RCC, Khouildi al-Hamidi, attended for his own personal reasons.

4. We must still discuss Mohamed Fekini's third son, Lamine, born in Taredia, on the Jebel, in 1910. As the reader will recall, he had led the daring group of *mujahideen* that on February 10, 1930, in Tachiomet, had attacked Graziani's vanguard to allow the bulk of the refugees to flee into Algeria. In other guerrilla actions, as well, Lamine had manifested uncommon courage, but he lacked all ambition, rejected public attention, and always dressed in the Arab style so that he did not stand out from the crowd. Unlike his brothers, who had taken prestigious positions and enjoyed comfortable economic treatment, Lamine had settled, during his years in exile in Tunisia, for a modest job as a guard in a French barracks and, once he returned to Libya, took the humblest position at the Ministry of Agriculture; nor had he asked for raises or advancement even when his brother Mohieddine was prime minister.[22]

Mohamed Fekini could well be proud of his children, who had honored him and helped him throughout his life and after his death had rigorously followed his wishes, carrying on his projects with consistency and courage, whatever the cost. Perhaps Gheddafi's Libya was not what Fekini's children had dreamed of during the years of *jihad* and exile. But they had respectfully accepted that regime, even though, instead of favoring them as patriots and capable people, it had hindered them and undermined them for reasons that were impossible to understand. And, when the regime had need of them, they had done their part because of their tireless love for the Libyan homeland.

The first to die was Lamine, in 1980. Then, in 1988, Ali Nouredine passed away. In 1994, Mohieddine died as well. Of Mohamed Fekini's

children, Mariam is still alive; she is 88 years old as of this writing and is bedridden and gravely ill.[23] But Mariam, who is still very lucid, forgets nothing of her long and tormented life. As the reader will recall, Mariam is one of the three eyewitnesses to the horrific trek across the Great Eastern Erg. It was she who watched her mother Aicha tend to the dying, piously close the eyes of the dead, and encourage the living to continue the march. Among other memories that still torment her was the attempt, planned out by the Italian intelligence services, to kidnap Mohamed Fekini from his exile in Tunisia. Fekini was aware that a number of spies were keeping an eye on the chiefs of the exiled *mujahideen* and always managed to foil their plans. But in the family, as Mariam recalls, the fear and caution was ever present.

5. And so we have come to the end of this almost incredible story. The characters that we have seen here almost seem to have walked out of the pages of the *Chansons de gestes*. Remarkable individuals, authentic, heretofore unknown or misunderstood, or even defamed. Characters to whom we should restore their dignity, the richness of their culture, the recognition of their rights and their history, unjustly crushed underfoot. Now that we are about to bid them farewell, entrusting them to the sensibilities and judgement of the readers, allow us to evoke a few of those who have struck us most forcefully, individuals whom we shall always remember.

Let us think of the *mujahideen*,
Whose names and surnames we know today,
Who shattered the Italian defenses
of Shara Shatt, of Henni, of Sidi el Mesri,
in that bloody October of 1911.

Let us think of the aged Mohamed Fekini
Eternally riding on horseback,
His Italian rifle slung around his neck,
His scimitar in his right hand,
His eye fixed fiercely on Graziani's cannons.

Let us think of Mohammed Ben Abdalla,
Considered the finest of the *mujahideen*.
In Maharuga he met Colonel Miani,
Stronger and wilier than him:
He died next to the green flag of the Prophet.

Let us think of Hassan Fekini,
Who had learned to love Italy
While studying at the University of Turin.

They sent him to die on the Jebel
fighting against the Berber Khalifa ben Askar.

Let us think of Ramadan al-Shitawi,
And his mad and tragic march on Beni Ulid.
To beat a rival
But he forgot that his long-time enemy was still in Tripoli,
And came from the sea, and spoke Italian.

Let us think of Hussein Fekini:
At the age of thirteen he was already in battle
Not far from Zuara Marina.
At twenty, death seized him
At the wells of el-Uchim.

Let us think of Kamel A'rab
Who fell in the gorge of As Salamat,
A latter-day Thermopylae,
and of his wife Aicha,
who died of malaria in the Wadi al Agaal.

Let us think of Suleiman el-Baruni,
And his dream of founding
A Berber empire extending
From Morocco to Egypt:
He failed by weaving too many plots.

Let us think of the children who died,
Of hunger, thirst, hardship,
In the deserts of Ghibla and Fezzan,
And their fathers who dug
Soft graves in the sand.

Let us think of the populations
Of en-Nofilia and Tazerbo,
bombarded with poison gases.
Upon their return to base the pilots
Toasted their missions with bottles of spumante.

Let us think of the severed head
Of Mohamed Fekini,
carried as a trophy to Tripoli,
To Governor Badoglio.
But it was the head of another man.

Let us think of Lamine Fekini:
At Tachiomet he halted the pursuers
Allowing most of the fugitives

To make it to safety in Algeria.
Warding off honors, he always lived in the shadows.

Let us think of Abd en-Nebi Belcher,
Almighty lord of the Orfella.
He survived a thousand ambushes,
And he was buried with fifty horsemen
By a raging sandstorm.

Let us think of Aicha Nouir
As she pours
The last drops of water
Into the lips of the dying people,
In the inferno of the Great Eastern Erg.

Let us think of Yusuf Cherbisc,
And the mountains of cash
He accumulated through treason.
He handed to Mussolini
The sword of Islam and felt no shame.

Let us think of Ali Nouredine,
Faithful servant to King Idris,
Obliged to put into verse
His condemnation of his monarch,
Surrounded by corrupt and hypocritical courtiers.

Let us think of Mohieddine Fekini,
prime minister of the King.
He was fired
because he was fighting on behalf of a
progressive Libya without bosses and masters.

And, last of all, let us think of the hundred thousand dead
That Libya sacrificed
To regain her freedom.
Sixty thousand in war,
Forty thousand behind the barbed wire of the camps.
One hundred thousand dead,
We can quickly reckon up the total:
One Libyan out of every eight
Gave their life for their homeland.

Appendix A

Timelines

Italian Prime Ministers

Prime Minister	*from*	*to*
Giolitti, Giovanni	March 30, 1911	March 19, 1914
Salandra, Antonio	March 21, 1914	November 5, 1914
Salandra, Antonio	November 5, 1914	June 18, 1916
Boselli, Paolo	June 18, 1916	October 29, 1917
Orlando, Vittorio Emanuele	October 29, 1917	June 23, 1919
Nitti, Francesco	June 23, 1919	May 21, 1920
Nitti, Francesco	May 21, 1920	June 15, 1920
Giolitti, Giovanni	June 15, 1920	July 4, 1921
Bonomi, Ivanoe	July 4, 1921	February 26, 1922
Facta, Luigi	February 26, 1922	August 1, 1922
Facta, Luigi	August 1, 1922	October 31, 1922
Mussolini, Benito	October 31, 1922	September 8, 1943

Ministry for Colonies

Minister	*from*	*to*
Bertolini, P.	November 20, 1912	March 19, 1914
Martini, F.	March 21, 1914	November 5, 1914
Martini, F.	November 5, 1914	June 18, 1916
Colosimo, G.	June 19, 1916	October 29, 1917
Colosimo, G.	October 29, 1917	June 22, 1919
Rossi, L.	June 23, 1919	March 13, 1920
Nitti, F., *int*.	March 14, 1920	May 21, 1920
Ruini, M. B.	May 22, 1920	June 14, 1920
Rossi, L.	June 15, 1920	July 3, 1921
Girardini, G.	July 4, 1921	February 15, 1922
Amendola, G.	February 16, 1922	August 1, 1922

Continued

Ministry for Colonies *Continued*

Minister	*from*	*to*
Federzoni, L.	October 31, 1922	June 17, 1924
Lanza di Scalea, P.	July 3, 1924	November 5, 1926
Federzoni, L.	October 31, 1922	June 17, 1924
Mussolini, B.	January 17, 1935	June 10, 1936
Lessona, A.	June 11, 1936	April 7, 1937

Ministry for Italian Africa

Minister	*from*	*to*
Lessona, A.	April 8, 1937	November 20, 1937
Mussolini, B.	November 21, 1937	July 25, 1943
Gabba, M.	July 25, 1943	September 8, 1943

Governors of Tripolitania

Governor	*from*	*to*
Borea, Ricci		
D'Olmo, Raffaele	October 5, 1911	October 113, 911
Caneva, Carlo	October 13, 1911	September 2, 1912
Ragni, Ottavio	September 2, 1912	June 1, 1913
Garioni, Vincenzo	June 1, 1913	October 1, 1914
Cigliana, Giorgio	October 2, 1914	November 16, 1914
Druetti, Luigi	November 16, 1914	February 5, 1915
Tassoni, Giulio Cesare	February 5, 1915	July 15, 1915
Ameglio, Giovanni	July 15, 1915	August 8, 1918
Garioni, Vincenzo	August 8, 1918	August 8, 1918
Menzinger, Vittorio	August 16, 1919	July 10, 1920
Niccoli, Ugo (Regent)	July 11, 1920	July 31, 1920
Mercatelli, Luigi	August 1, 1920	July 16, 1921
Volpi di Misurata, Giuseppe	July 16, 1921	July 3, 1925
De Bono, Emilio	July 3, 1925	December 18, 1928
Badoglio, Pietro	July 3, 1925	December 18, 1928
Balbo, Italo	January 1, 1934	June 28, 1940

Appendix B

Two Pages from Fekini's Memoirs

We saw their officers, among them the Commander Neshat Bey, who had prepared their surrender and were preparing to submit that surrender agreement to the Italian state, just as the people of Zanzur and Wershaffana had done; they would then mount up and ride away in defeat. I was aggrieved at the sight, and I quoted the verse by the poet:

> *I had been told that Zaid was a hero,*
> *not a man who bares the nape of his neck to the enemy.*

And so I spoke to them and, feigning great enthusiasm, I tried to persuade them to continue to put up a fierce resistance. Together we would fight against the foreign invaders and we would defend our homeland to the death. At last, we all spoke in unison:

> *O Allah, give us victory*
> *for there is no strength nor power but in You!*

Then Neshat Bey proposed a series of tasks for each of us, which we accepted joyfully. First and foremost: obtain as soon as possible camels to transport soldiers and materiel into the mountains, in accordance with the orders conveyed by telegraph from the military governor. Second of all, since the most strategic point in the mountains was Garian, whose people planned to surrender to the Italians—in the wake of the surrender of the provincial capital and surrounding areas—it was necessary, first and foremost, to go there, see how matters stood, and bring order to the ranks.

It was the evening of Friday 13 October of the year in which the artillerymen of the Italian navy and their roaring cannons hailed

down upon us like thunder. The following day we returned to el-Azizia, and there we met a number of the notables of Wershaffana, including the sons of Ali ben Tantush. I reminded them that Allah had promised victory to the worshipful fighters. I asked them, then, to ready themselves to defend and protect their religion, their homeland, and their honor as Arabs, because it was not honorable to cede Arab land without spilling a drop of their children's blood…

Translation from the Arabic by Jean-Pierre Milelli

That day, while they were at Mallaha al-Watia a reconnaissance airplane flew overhead. Those who were still there, the group of Mohamed Fekini, Mohammed Ben Hassen, and Sheikh Omar ben Ahmed, left at nightfall, traveling toward the wadi region to inquire, at Tabqa, after Sheik Ahmed Sef en-Nasser with whom they had agreed on a rendezvous further south. They marched all night and at dawn they arrived at Umm el-Melah, in the Wadi Zemzem. At sunrise, however, they were spotted by five airplanes, sent out to scout by a powerful Italian detachment that had arrived in the area and which had received reports of the presence of the Muslim forces from two Zintan spies. Those spies had informed the Italians of the presence of Mohamed Fekini and his comrades in the Wadi Melah. The airplanes dropped more than a hundred bombs but failed to hit anyone, save for two camels.

The airplanes had not yet finished their attack when the Muslims were greeted with another surprise. There arrived 3,000 soldiers and 600 Savari, Italians, and Arabs, led by Lieutenant Colonel Galliani and by Khalifa Khaled. Among the Arabs were a great many members of the Ulad Bu Sef and Magarha and a few Zintans, including Mohamed Tamtam el-Busayfi. The battle raged from morning to night, with tremendous noise: horses and men soared and turned like eagles. My God! The Muslims suffered terrible reverses: only a few horses survived, and they set off, carrying Mohamed Fekini, Ahmed el-Mabruk, Belkasem ben Gharbi el-Rojebani, Ahmed Ikgiam el Ghanimi, and Omar ben Ahmed. In all, twenty-five horses survived the battle.

Most of the Muslims's beasts were killed: there remained only a few camels; even the water in the waterskins was lost. Once the

enemy had completed his encirclement, only a few fighters succeeded in escaping from the wadi. The enemy hemmed them in on all sides and the fighting resumed furiously. And when the two groups moved off, the Italians' cannon and airplanes continued to pound at the Muslims, following them for a long time. When, at long last, the survivors descended from their horses, they realized that fifty mujahideen failed to answer the roll calls, and that all the rest were without water and food. As for Sheik Ahmed el-Mabruk and his comrades, they had escaped toward Tabqa.

The group of soldiers led by Mohamed Fekini and Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen headed north and found water in a small lake midway between Fassato and Mizda. During that march, they returned by night to the battlefield to see which of the Muslims had been killed there. But the enemies had already reached the site of the battle, and having found a man there who resembled Sheik Fekini, with his horse and clothing, they cut off his head and entrusted it to an aviator who took it to the governor of Tripoli (may Allah curse his name!), and then reported the news in their publications.

On the battlefield, they found a number of the mujahideen that they had believed were lost. In reality, only seventeen of them had died a martyr's death. As for the corpses of the unbelievers, both Italians and Arabs, there were more than four hundred. Among the Muslims who were believed to have been killed, there was Sheik Omar ben Ahmed and his brother Mohamed el-Baruni. Five days later, though, their bodies were found: el-Baruni had died a martyr's death in those mountains; as for Sheik Omar, who had only been wounded, he was brought to Mallaha and, subsequently, to Fezzan, and reunited with his family.

The group led by Mohamed Fekini and by Mohammed Ben Hag Hassen remained for a number of days at Mallaha to care for the wounded. At their side were also the warriors of Sheik Dakhil and his grandfather, el-Faqih Tayr Liuqba. And since these mujahideen had lost everything they owned, waterskins and provisions, during the battle in the Wadi Zemzem, Mohamed Fekini purchased four kid goats and gave them freely to these fighters. Then he ordered that they be slaughtered that the warriors might eat, and their skins were used to make new waterskins.

Translation from the Arabic by Jean-Pierre Milelli

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Appendix C

Arabic and Turkish Words Used in the Text

al-Mab'authan Tripolitanian Assembly
al-Hizb al-Watani Nationalist Party
al-Jabha al-Wataniyya al-Muttahida National Unity Front
al-Kutla al-Wataniyya al-Hurra National Independent Bloc
bey Turkish title assigned to high functionaries
cadi judge
kaymakam subprefect
fatwa verdict
fellahin peasants
gahra fortress
Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya Republic of Tripolitania
hadith sayings of the Prophet
holi mantle
khalifah Kabyle chieftain
kettab Koranic school
jihad holy war
liwa territorial subdivision
mehalla mobile force of warriors
moudiriah municipality
mudir district agent
mufti Muslim sage
mujahideen Muslim warriors
mutasarrif prefect
rushdiyya preparatory schools
serir pebble-strewn desert
shari'a canon law of Islam
shaykh head of a religious brotherhood
sunnah deeds of the Prophet

sura chapter of the Koran
wadi stream of water with an intermittent flow
ulama essays on religious topics
vilayet province of the Turkish empire
vali governor
zawiya headquarters of a Senussi brotherhood

Notice

For the transcription of Arabic personal and proper names, we have made use of the most commonly accepted versions in English.

Notes

Foreword

1. This is a manuscript in Arabic, 347 pages long, written in two different types of ink: in black, for the narratives of events; in red, for the quotes from the Koran and from classic works of Arabic literature.
2. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*. Vol. I, *Tripoli bel suol d'amore, 1860-1922*, Laterza, Bari 1986; Vol. II, *Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*, Laterza, Bari 1988. The two volumes have now been published in the Oscar Mondadori series.
3. In official Italian documents, the name of Mohamed Fekini appears in many variant forms. General Graziani refers to him as "Hag Mohamed Figheni"; Governor Giuseppe Volpi calls him "Fgheni"; elsewhere he appears as, variously, "Fechini" and "al-Fakini." From a document composed on April 26, 1915 by the minister resident of Fassatu, Major Voglino, on the occasion of a police report submitted by Mohamed Fekini declaring his possession of an automatic pistol, we learn that the personal attributes of the chief of the Rojeban were the following:
   age: 65
   height: 1 meter 66 cm (5′ 4″)
   build: normal
   complexion: dark
   hair: grey
   beard: white
   distinguishing features: squint in his left eye
4. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 113/1, f. 4. See also enclosure no. 15, in the Archive of Anwar Fekini (AAF), a copy of a page of the *Bollettino Ufficiale della Tripolitania*, no. 12. The document reads: "A reward of 10,000 francs will be paid to anyone who succeeds in capturing or killing the above-named Hajj Mohammad Fekini Ben Khalifat Ben Abdallah Attaridi Arrojbani. Tripoli, 11 September 1916."

Introduction

1. Letter from Mohamed Fekini to General Rodolfo Graziani (June 10, 1922), cited in chapter 10 of the present volume.

2. Ali Abdullah Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices. Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p.36.
3. Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Lib*ia 2 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1986 and 1987). Del Boca's books on Italian colonialism are too numerous to list here. Among his books dedicated to Libyan history are *La disfatta di Gasr Bu Hàdi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), and *Gheddafi. Una sfida dal deserto* (Bari: Laterza, 2001). *See also* Giorgio Rochat's seminal work on Libya that includes *Guerre italiane in Libia e in Etiopia. Studi militari 1921–1939* (Treviso: Pagus Edizioni, 1991); Claudio Segrè, *The Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and John Wright, *Libya: A Modern History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982).
4. To cite only works from the last decade: Nicola Labanca, ed., *Un nodo: immagini e documenti sulla repressione coloniale italiana in Libia* (Manduria: Lacaita, 2002); Federico Cresti, ed., *La Libia tra Mediterraneo e mondo islamico* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 2006); Brian McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya. An Ambivalent Modernism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Dirk Vandewalle *A History of Modern Libya* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad. Architecture, Cities, and Italian Imperialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). These works build on the foundation provided by Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp.201–13, and Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya. State Formation, Colonization and Resistance 1830–1932* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994). Articles on Libya figure in the essays collected in these edited works on Italian colonialism in English: Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005); Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds., *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); and in Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke and Lars Jensen, eds., *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures. Continental Europe and its Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp.262–313.
5. Mia Fuller, "Libya," *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires* p.303. On these early phases of history-writing, see Lisa Anderson, "Legitimacy, Identity, and History in Libya," in *Statecraft in the Middle East. Oil, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture* eds. Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides (Miami: Florida International Press, 1991), pp.71–91 .The fullest history of Libyan history writing in English is Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation. Colonial legacy, Exile, and the Emergence of a New Nation State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), esp. pp.10–27; see also Baldinetti, *Modern and Contemporary Libya: Sources and Historiographies* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2003); and Pierluigi Venuta, "La storiografia libica sul colonialismo italiano: motivi e problemi," in *Bibliografia della Libia coloniale 1911–2000, eds.* Venuti and Nicola Labanca (Florence: Olschki, 2004), pp.LV-LXXX.

6. On the development of the Libyan Studies Centre from its foundations to today, see Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* pp.20–24.
7. The fruits of these conferences are gathered in volumes such as Nicola Labanca and Pierluigi Venuta, eds., *Un colonialism, due sponde del Mediterraneo. Atti del seminario di studi storici italo-libici (Sienta-Pistoia, 13–14 gennaio 2000)* (Pistoia: C.R.T., 2000); and the series of volumes on the deportation of Libyan resisters to Italian penal colonies edited by Francesco Sulpizi and Salaheddin Hasan Sury, *Primo convegno su gli esiliati libici nel periodo coloniale: 28–29 ottobre 2000, Isole Tremiti* (Rome: IsIAO, 2002); *Secondo convegno su gli esiliati libici nel periodo colonial: 3–4 novembre 2001, Isole Egadi, Favig*nana (Rome: ISIAO, 2003); and Carla Ghezzi and Salaheddin Hasan Sury, eds., *Terzo convegno su gli esiliati libici nel periodo coloniale, 30–31 ottobre 2002, Isola di Ponza* (Rome: IsIAO, 2005). In November 2009 Mia Fuller organized a conference of Libyan scholars at the University of California, Berkeley, on: "Writing and Speaking Libya's Histories: Libyan Historiography of Modern and Contemporary Libya." Claudia Gazzini and Emanuela Paoletti also organized a conference at the Middle East Centre, Oxford University, September 25, 2009: "Libya: Legacy of the Past, Prospects for the Future," with many Libyan participants.
8. See on these Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* pp.25–26.
9. See, in English, Giorgio Rochat, Enzo Santarelli, Romain Rainero and Luigi Goglia, eds., *Omar al-Mukhtar. The Italian Reconquest of Libya* (London: Darf, 1986); Rochat, "La repressione della resistenza in Cirenaica, 1927–1931," in Rochat, *Guerre italiane in Libia e in Etiopia,* pp.29–98; David Atkinson, "Embodied Resistance, Italian Anxieties and the Place of the Nomad in Colonial Cyrenacia," in *In Corpore. Bodies in Post-Unification Italy,* eds. Loredana Polezzi and Charlotte Ross (Madison, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 2007), pp.56–79, and his "Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance. Domination and Resistance in Cyrenaica, 1923–1932," in *The Entanglements of Power. Geographies of Domination/Resistance* eds. J.Sharp et al (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.93–121; and Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia. Le atrocità noscoste dell'avventura coloniale italiana (1911–1931)* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2005) and the early denunciation by Knud Holmboe, *Desert Encounter* (1931; reprint, New York: G.P.Putman's. 1994).
10. Quote from Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* p.44.
11. Suleyman al-Baruni 's relationship with the Italians was motivated by his dream of obtaining an independent Ibadi Berber province. On Arab-Berber conflict in these years and Suleyman al-Baruni, see Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp.201–213 and Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* pp.56–58.
12. This argument is made by Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices,* pp.74–79.
13. Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, Governor of Tripolitania, April 1, 1925 letter, in Del Boca, present volume, chapter 11.
14. 1922 letter from Mohamed Fekini to Rodolfo Graziani, cited in Chapter 10 in the present volume.

15. Minister of Colonies Luigi Federzoni, *Veni mesi di azione colonial* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), p.55, cited in the present volume, chapter 11, note 2.
16. See note 10 on these crimes.
17. See the Luce newsreel A0805, "Il Sottosegretariato dello Stato alle Colonie in Cirenaica," June 1931, accessed August 29, 2009, at www.luce.it. Photographs of the camps, with a long discussion, were published in Angelo Piccioli, ed., *La nuova Italia d'Oltremare* 2 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1933), I/125–250.
18. Italo Balbo, letter of December 10, 1935, cited in the present volume, chapter 13, note 14.
19. The 1928 movie *Kif tebbi* (Mario Camerini), set at the start of the Italo-Turkish War, has as its protagonist a young Libyan notable from Tripolitania who has lived in Italy and has become Europeanized. He is summoned to fight with the Turks but finds his place when he goes over to the Italian side. On this film see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascism's Empire Cinema: Histories and Journeys of Conquest and Defeat* (to be published by Indiana University Press), Chapter One.
20. Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation,* pp.56–59 on Tripolitanians in Tunisia.
21. Ibid., p.58.
22. This quote is from the last page of Mohamed Fekini's memoir, as reported by Del Boca in the present volume, chapter 12.
23. See Angelo Del Boca, *Dentro mi è nato l'uomo*. Originally published in 1947, it has been reissued by Interlinea Editions of Novara in 2009.
24. Del Boca, present volume, chapter 14. Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices,* pp.46–53, discusses the importance of poetry as a source for recovering Libyan experience of mass persecution.
25. 1922 letter from Mohamed Fekini to Graziani, cited in chapter 10 of the present volume.

1 Tripolitania under Ottoman Rule

1. Mohamed Fekini, *Luci sugli avvenimenti della Tripolitania all'epoca della colonizzazione italiana, 1911–1930*, Unpublished memoirs, translated out of the Arabic by Omar Saghi, p. 1.
2. Enver Pasha, *Diario della guerra libica*, translated into Italian by Salvatore Bono, Cappelli, Bologna 1986.
3. Turkish rule over the *vilayet* of Tripolitania and the *liwa* of Cyrenaica extended from 1551 to 1911, with a hiatus between 1711 and 1835, when actual power was exercised by an officer of the Janissaries, Ahmed Karamanli, who founded a dynasty that ruled although under Ottoman sovereignty.
4. Ahmed Fadel Fekini (1875–1965), in contrast with his brothers Mohamed and Massaud, did not take part in the resistance during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–1912 because he was in Istanbul on his mission as a representative. He took a pledge of submission to the Italians in 1913 and was appointed by

Governor Ragni as a native consultant to the government. Suspected of having been the mastermind behind a plot set in motion in 1914 at Al Ajaylat, in 1916, he was dismissed from his office. He was restored to that office in 1919, after the concession of the Statute to the Libyans, but he was still kept under watch by the police. In 1922, just when he was about to be arrested on charges of favoring the rebellion, he managed to escape by sea to Turkey. Later he moved to Gaza, in Palestine, and refused to return home, even when his nephew Mohieddine, at that present time, the prime minister of Libya, was urging him to come back. He died penniless and took the secret of his forced exile with him to the grave. See, for his life and experiences: ASMAI, b. 103, f. 390, letter from General Ameglio dated September 16, 1916, no. 1892, to the Ministry for Colonies.

5. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
6. Mohammed ben Othman al-Hachaichi, *Voyage au Pays des Senoussia à travers la Tripolitanie et le pays touaregh*, Imprimerie Darantiere, Dijon 1903, p. 278.
7. Ibid.
8. See Ira M. Lapidus, *Storia delle società islamiche*, vol. III, *I popoli musulmani*, Einaudi, Turin 1995, p. 175 (Italian edition of A History of Islamic Societies, Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
9. Muhammad al-Tahir al-Jarari, *L'istruzione in Libia prima e dopo il 1911*, in *Un colonialismo, due sponde del Mediterraneo*, edited by Nicola Labanca and Pierluigi Venuta, Editrice CRT, Pistoia 2000, p. 67.
10. Paolo Soave, *Fezzan: il deserto conteso (1841–1911)*, Giuffrè, Milan 2001, pp. 89–90.
11. In the archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry in the Farnesina Palace, there is a file weighing several kilograms, chiefly concerned with the repeated demands for payment from the Muntassers. See: ASMAI, *Libia,* pos. 150/13, ff. 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.
12. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
13. Rodolfo Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, Mondadori, Milan 1937, p. 15.
14. Enrico Corradini, *L'ora di Tripoli*, Treves, Milan 1911, p. 231.
15. Ibid., p. 241.
16. See, with reference to the myth of the Roman world, Massimiliano Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno. Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana,* L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome 2001, pp. 9–30.
17. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 103/3, f. 23.
18. ACS, *Carte Giolitti*, env. 22, f. 59, tel. 1059/449.
19. Carlo Galli, *Diari e lettere, Tripoli 1911–Trieste 1918*, Sansoni, Florence 1951, p. 65.
20. Concerning the diplomatic, psychological, and secret preparation of the invasion of Libya, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Tripoli bel suol d'amore, 1860–1922*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1986, pp. 3–95. The book is now also available in the Arabic language, having been published in 1995 by the Libyan Studies Centre, in a fine translation by Mahum Ali Tayeb.

2 The Surprise of Shara Shatt

1. The text of the ultimatum was delivered at 2:30 p.m. on September 28, 1911, personally, to the grand vizier, Hakki Pasha. As a French scholar has rightly noted, the document "contained nothing more than vague complaints, none of which could constitute a *casus belli*." (See: R.L., *La guerre de Tripoli et l'esprit public en Italie*, "Chronique Sociale de France," March 1912, pp. 81–82).
2. The Italian fleet, under the command of Vice Admiral Luigi Faravelli, included more than 20 ships, among them battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and other smaller vessels: an absolutely disproportionate show of force in comparison with the objective to be taken.
3. Quoted in Massimo Adolfo Vitale, *L'Italia in Africa. L'opera dell'Esercito*, tome III, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Rome 1964, pp. 11–12.
4. Cesare Causa, *La guerra italo-turca e la conquista della Tripolitania e della Cirenaica*, Salani, Florence 1913, p. 188.
5. Luigi Cadorna, *Lettere famigliari*, Mondadori, Milan 1967, p. 82.
6. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 11.
9. Ibid., p. 13.
10. Ibid., p. 16.
11. The most plausible number is about eight to ten thousand men, including the Turks in the garrison of Tripoli.
12. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
13. Felice Piccioli, *Diario di un bersagliere*, Edizioni Il Formichiere, Milan 1974, p. 26. The known Italian dead at Shara Shatt were 21 officers and 482 enlisted men.
14. Aldo Chierici, *A Tripoli d'Italia: diario di un corrispondente di guerra*, Simonti, Pistoia 1912, p. 90.
15. See: Romain Rainero, *Paolo Valera e l'opposizione democratica all'impresa di Tripoli*, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome 1983, pp. 97–101. Concerning the figure of 4,000 dead, the Libyan historian Habib Wada'ah el-Hasnawi agrees; see his essay *Effetti psico-sociali delle operazioni di deportazione dei libici nelle isole italiane sugli esiliati e i loro parenti in epoca coloniale (1911–1943)*, in Francesco Sulpizi, Salaheddin Hasan Sury, *Primo convegno sugli esiliati libici nel periodo coloniale*, October 28–29, 2000 Tremiti Islands, ISIAO, Libyan Center for Historical Studies, Rome 2002, p. 29.
16. Making use of the reporting of foreign journalists, Paolo Valera published a 32-page pamphlet, illustrated with photographs of executions and deportations, entitled *Le giornate di Sciara Sciat fotografate*, Tipografia Borsani, Milan 1911. One hundred copies of the pamphlet were sold, evidence that not all Italians had allowed themselves to be hoodwinked by the brushfire of nationalism and racism.
17. ACS, *Carte Giolitti*, b. 22, f. 58. Tel. no. 27979 of 4:45 pm of 24 October 1911.

18. Archival documents mention 48 deaths from cholera in a two-month period. See: Salaheddin Hasan Sury, Giampaolo Malgeri, *Gli esiliati libici nel periodo coloniale (1911–1916), Raccolta documentaria*, ISIAO, Libyan Center for Historical Studies, Rome 2005, p. 171.
19. Paolo Valera, *La fine dei prigionieri di Stato*, "La folla," no. 14, 27 October 1912, p. 20.
20. In the Italo-Libyan agreements of 1998, there are provisions for a joint investigation on the fate of the deportees. The responsibility for the research has been entrusted to the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente and the Centro Libico per gli Studi Storici, or Libyan Center for Historical Studies. So far, four volumes have been published, on the following detention sites: the Tremiti Islands, the Aegadian Islands, Favignana, and the islands of Ponza and Ustica.
21. A. Chierici, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
22. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
23. Ibid., p. 33.
24. AUSSME, env. 2, f. 5.
25. Ministero della Guerra (Italian Ministry of War), *Campagna di Libia*, vol. II, Libreria dello Stato, Rome 1924, pp. 225–29.
26. The corpses, according to Italian documents, were thrown into the sea, in some cases close to the coast. This is an extract from an article that appeared in the daily newspaper "L'Ora" on November 8/9, 1911: "The conditions on Ustica are now extremely alarming. Because of the Arab corpses tossed into the sea from the steamship *S. Giorgio* not far from the beach, the fish market has been suspended.... The burial of other Arabs who died of cholera, in shallow graves in the sand on private property, easy pickings for stray dogs, constitutes a further menace to the public health."
27. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
28. Ibid., p. 20.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. For a thorough reconstruction of the events of Shara Shatt and the subsequent massacres and deportations, see A. Del Boca, *op. cit.*, pp. 96–124; Lino Del Fra, *Sciara Sciat. Genocidio nell'oasi*, Datanews, Rome 1995; Sergio Romano, *La quarta sponda*, Bompiani, Milan 1977.

3 The Clash with Suleiman el-Baruni

1. Gustavo Pesenti, *Le guerre coloniali*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1947, p. 282.
2. In Cyrenaica, Colonel Enver Pasha, the future Turkish minister of war, commanded the operations against the Italians.
3. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
4. Ibid.
5. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
6. Born at Jadu in Jebel Nefusa, in 1870, Suleiman el-Baruni was elected representative for the Jebel in 1908. That same year, he published in Cairo the

magazine “al-Asad al-Islam” (The Lion of Islam). In 1913, following the battle of Asabaa and his flight from Tripolitania, he printed in Constantinople, at the printing shop of the newspaper “Al-Adl,” a pamphlet entitled *The Memoirs of Baruni, or a Bilingual Epistle Published in Arabic and Turkish, Containing an Address by the Great and Renowned Suleiman al-Baruni*. The document, preceded by a brief biography of the man, was published in Italy by “Studi Piacentini,” no. 12/1992, with the title *Le memorie del Baruni, ossia epistola bilingue pubblicata in arabo e in turco, contenente il discorso del grande e celebre Suleiman al-Baruni*.

7. In 1913, following the disastrous battle of Asabaa and his flight to Tunisia, Suleiman el-Baruni defended himself against the accusations leveled against him by the Italian press: “If anyone could show me evidence that my hand had taken a single penny from Italy, I would not hesitate to cut that hand off.... The sum total of 2,767 napoleons paid to me as a subvention (by certain private citizens) is not enough money to pay for the camels used to carry provisions for our combatants for a single month. I have been obliged to spend out of my own pocket the amount of which no one knows but me, and had I not been forced into it, I would never have mentioned it at all, since I spent that money on behalf of my religion and my homeland, and therefore without the slightest merit accruing to me (quoted in Suleiman el-Baruni, *op. cit*, pp. 166–67).
8. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–37.
9. Ibid., p. 45.
10. Giovanni Giolitti, *Memorie della mia vita*, Treves, Milan 1922, vol. II, p. 416.
11. Quoted in Paolo Maltese, *La terra promessa*, Sugar, Milan 1968, pp. 297–98.
12. Enver Pasha, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

4 Interval of Peace

1. Mustafa Hamed Rahuma, *La resistenza nazionale libica all’invasione italiana*, p. 3. Lecture delivered at the conference *La storiografia sui rapporti italo-libici dal 1900 ad oggi*, hosted by the Department of History at the University of Perugia (March 11–13, 1985).
2. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
3. Neshat Bey left Tripoli on December 8, 1912, embarking with his soldiers on the ships *Verona* and *Sannio*.
4. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/14, f. 55. From the report by Governor Ottavio Ragni to the ministry for colonies (January 19, 1913), entitled: *Questione del Gebel. Situazione politica*.
5. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
6. Francesco Corò, *Suleiman el-Baruni. Il sogno di un principato berbero e la battaglia di Asàbaa*, “Gli Annali dell’Africa Italiana,” year I, no. 3/4, December 1938, p. 960.
7. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

8. Ibid., p. 53.
9. Ibid., p. 56.
10. Ibid., p. 62.
11. In fact, the sultan's firman allowed complete autonomy to the two *vilayets* of Libya. Commenting on the document, which had also been accepted by the Italians, the great Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino wrote in "L'Unità," "History records perhaps no other example of a treaty that has been negotiated and signed with such complete ignorance of the institutions of the enemy."
12. Suleiman el-Baruni, *op. cit.*, p. 156.
13. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
14. According to article 4 of the peace treaty,

    > The two governments undertake to issue a full and complete amnesty.... Consequently, no individual, of whatever class or condition, can be tried or disturbed, in their person or property or in the exercise of their rights, as a result of their political and military acts or opinions expressed during the hostilities.

    The complete text of the treaty of Ouchy is found in Francesco Malgeri, *Laguerra libica (1911–1912)*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1970, pp. 402–05).
15. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
16. Ibid.
17. F. Malgeri, *op. cit.*, p. 403.
18. Habib Wada'ah el-Hasnawi, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
19. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 149 and 210.
20. Suleiman el-Baruni, *op. cit.*, p. 164. The letter was dated March 16, 1913. When el-Baruni spoke of "selling the homeland for money," he was certainly referring to the fact that the Italian authorities had awarded Muktar Bey Koobar an annual stipend of 12,000 lire.
21. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/14, f. 55. From Ragni's report to the ministry for colonies, dated January 19, 1913, cit., p. 4. In his report, Ragni also said,

    > Already under Turkish rule he had put on the airs of a sultan, and so the Turks themselves persecuted and even imprisoned him. Now, in his imagination, relying upon the influence that he has long had over the mass of Arabs both because of his learning and his venerable family, he dared for a moment to believe that he could carry on as the absolute master of the Jebel.... Morally, he has also degenerated. It appears that he has taken possession of both money and grain that the Turks donated on behalf of the children of the Arabs killed in the war. And this was not the least of the reasons why the chieftains decided no longer to tolerate him and came to us in a stance of submission.
22. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/14, f. 55. Letter sent from Cavour.
23. As he was traveling toward the Tunisian border, Suleiman el-Baruni wrote a letter to General Lequio, stating that he had not been responsible for breaking the truce but that it had been the Ulad Bu Sef under Mohammed Ben Abdalla and "a few other arrogant individuals. I would not have wished that the slightest hostile act come to pass, because I was waiting for the outcome

of the work done by my delegates. But fate is irrevocable." The text of the letter can be found in F. Corò, *op. cit.*, p. 967.

24. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 140–43. Suleiman el-Baruni left Tunisia at the beginning of May 1913 and set off on a long journey that took him to Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Bucharest, and Constantinople. Everywhere he went, he gave interviews explaining his actions in Libya and rejecting the accusations of corruption. Turkey honored him by appointing him senator.
25. After Enver Pasha's departure for Turkey, the struggle against the Italians was carried on by Ahmed esh-Sherif, chief of the Sanusiya, the powerful religious brotherhood that boasted two million followers and no fewer than 146 *zawiyas*.
26. Concerning the occupation of Fezzan and its subsequent loss, with serious repercussions on the very presence of the Italians in Tripolitania, see Angelo Del Boca, *La disfatta di Gasr Bu Hàdi. 1915: il colonnello Miani e il più grande disastro dell'Italia coloniale*, Mondadori, Milan 2004.
27. Luigi Cadorna, *Altre pagine sulla Grande Guerra*, Mondadori, Milan 1925, p. 48.
28. Istituto Coloniale Italiano, *Atti del Convegno nazionale coloniale per il dopoguerra delle colonie*, Tipografia dell'Unione Editrice, Rome 1920, p. 286. From the lecture by Vincenzo Giovanni De Meo.
29. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
30. AAF, enclosure no. 2. A letter with quite a similar text can also be found in ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/6, f. 47.

5 The Great Arab Revolt

1. Italian chamber of deputies, or Camera dei Deputati, *Atti parlamentari*, XXIV legislature, first session, sitting December 18, 1913, pp. 555–57.
2. Concerning the condition of the deportees, even the general inspector of public safety (*ispettore generale di pubblica sicurezza*), Adolfo Lutrario, wrote following an inspection at Favignana, "The nutrition of the Arabs, limited only to a ration of bread and soup, is considered inadequate to keep up their strength and it is the opinion of the physicians that the Arabs themselves will inevitably fall into a progressive decline, and that their metabolisms will be incapable of withstanding the onset of potential disease, especially lengthy and dangerous ones." Quoted in *Gli esiliati libici nel periodo coloniale (1911–1916)*, edited by Salaheddin Hasan Sury and Giampaolo Malgeri, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, Rome 2005, p. 195.
3. Arturo Vacca Maggiolini, *La situazione in Tripolitania*, "Rivista Militare Italiana," January 1922, pp. 41–45.
4. General Gherardo Pàntano, *Ventitré anni di vita africana*, SATET, Turin 1943, p. 274. Khalifa ben Askar was probably acting in part at the instigation of Suleiman el-Baruni, who was at that time blocked in Sollum with Ahmed esh-Sherif.
5. Raffaele Ciasca, *Storia coloniale dell'Italia contemporanea*, Hoepli, Milan 1940, p. 436. For the battle, see A. Del Boca, *La disfatta di Gasr Bu Hàdi*, cit., pp. 9–16.

6. The letter is in Ferdinando Martini, *Diario, 1914–1918*, Mondadori, Milan 1966, p. 462.
7. Istituto Coloniale Italiano, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
8. Meuccio Ruini, *L'Islam e le nostre colonie*, Il Solco, Città di Castello 1922, p. 77.
9. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–55.
10. Archivio Anwar Fekini, enclosure no. 5.
11. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/9, f. 76. Report no. 2286, secret, p. 2.
12. Ibid., pp. 7–8.
13. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 163.
14. Ibid., pp. 161–62.
15. The announcement of the reward for Mohamed Fekini was dated September 11, 1916. See the complete text of the order in AAF, enclosure no. 15.
16. Ettore Miraglia had been made prisoner, along with 2,000 other Italian, Eritrean, and Libyan soldiers, on July 9, 1915, during the great Arab revolt.
17. Ettore Miraglia, *Tra le quinte della rivolta libica*, unpublished document, in DLPA, pp. 74–75. Ahmed Tuati was hanged at the orders of Ramadan al-Shitawi in March 1916, at Misratah, along with two other Senussi chiefs.
18. The Turkish note to Italy is quoted in *Opera tratta dagli scritti di Gaspare Colosimo: 1916–1919*, edition not for sale, Scuola Tipografica Pontificia Bartolo Longo, Pompeii 1959, p. 54.
19. Nuri Pasha, a very young general commanding a division, was the brother of Minister of War Enver Pasha. At Misratah, he commanded the Turkish forces.
20. E. Miraglia, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
21. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 110/1, f 1. Report no. 1667 dated August 18, 1916.
22. Raffaele Rapex, *L'affermazione della sovranità italiana in Tripolitania*, Chihli Press, Tianjin 1937, pp. 73–74.
23. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
24. AAF, enclosure no. 11.
25. Ibid., enclosure no. 13, dated August 7, 1916.
26. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 178. Mohamed Sof was pressuring Fekini to attack Fassatu: "When you receive this letter, take the initiatives required to begin to wage war against Fassatu, without delay. I have learned that the Italian forces have been reinforced at Zuara, with the intention of sending relief to Fassatu." (Vedi AAF, enclosure no. 12).
27. AAF, enclosure no. 6.
28. The Koobar family was one of the most important clans of Jebel Garian. Muktar Bey Koobar had been representative for Garian in the Ottoman parliament. El-Hajj Koobar was *kaymakam* of Gasr Garian under Turkish rule. With Ahmed Rasem Koobar, the youngest of the three brothers, he had placed himself in Italian service immediately after the end of the Italo-Turkish war. After the Koobar went over to the rebel camp, Ahmed Rasem was stripped of his command of the "Garian band" and, subsequently, in 1917, was deported to Ustica. He was liberated on November 4, 1918, through the intervention of the Minister for Colonies Colosimo.

6 The Birth of the Jumhuriyah et-Trabulsiyya

1. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 190–91.
2. AAF, enclosure no. 16.
3. Ibid., enclosure no. 17.
4. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
5. Ibid., p. 195.
6. According to the inevitably unreliable Italian estimates, the Arabs lost 820 to death, and 1,200 were wounded.
7. AAF, enclosure no. 18.
8. Ibid., enclosure no. 19. These were Italian field artillery, captured during the first months of the great Arab revolt, and German-made Turkish cannons.
9. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
10. Gherardo Pàntano, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
11. Ibid., p. 288.
12. Ibid., p. 289. Suleiman el-Baruni, too, was aware of the climate that prevailed in Tripoli. In a letter addressed to Mohamed Fekini he wrote:

    > The people who have been obliged to leave Tripoli and travel toward Tarhuna have told us that the enemy is experiencing difficulties caused by the war in Europe, that Rome is under siege, that Tripoli is isolated from the sea, that the Italians have confiscated the provisions of the inhabitants and have prevented the landowners of Suani Ben Adem to harvest their crops (AAF, enclosure no. 19).
13. Ibid., p. 332.
14. Ottorino Mezzetti, *Guerra in Libia*, Cremonese, Rome 1933, p. 11.
15. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
16. E. Miraglia, *op. cit.*, pp. 227–28.
17. When hostilities were halted, Prince Othman Fuad and his entourage left the country, crossing into Tunisia, and later reached Istanbul.
18. See, for instance, among the various Italian scholars who have studied the Berber chieftain, Francesco Corò, *Suleiman el-Baruni. Il sogno di un principato berbero e la battaglia di Asàaba*, “Gli annali dell’Africa Italiana,” year I, no. 3/4, December 1938, pp. 957–69.
19. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/14, f. 58.
20. AAF, enclosure no. 7.
21. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
22. AAF, enclosure no. 20, dated March 1, 1919.

7 Italy Issues the Statutes

1. DDI, 6th series, vol. 1, doc. 570. Communiqué dated December 16, 1918.
2. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 113/1, f. 15.
3. G. Pàntano, *op. cit.*, p. 313.
4. O. Mezzetti, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
5. G. Pàntano, *op. cit.*, pp. 313–14.

6. The letter, dated February 26, 1919, was addressed to Ramadan al-Shitawi, Ahmed el-Mraied, Suleiman el-Baruni, Muktar Bey Koobar, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, el-Hajj Koobar, Mohamed Fekini, and Ali Ben Tantush. See AAF, enclosure no. 25.
7. ASMAE, b. 103, f. 390. Handwritten "minute," undated, but certainly from 1920, p. 1.
8. Ibid. On the same date, September 29, 1918, Hassan wrote as well to his uncle Fadel, appealing to him as well to collaborate with the Italians, just as he had to his father. In the letter, he also stated that General Tarditi had done him "the great honor of paying him a visit."
9. Ibid., "minute," *cit.,* p. 3. Dated February 18, 1919, the governor of Tripolitania, General Garioni, telegraphed to the ministry for colonies confirming that the dispatch of the young Hassan to Tripoli had already produced excellent results.

   > The arrival of the young Fekini has made a fine impression as tangible proof of a political stance based on sincere intentions. His father has already written to the government and is doing a great deal in favor of pacification. The presence here of his son, whose pro-Italian sentiments are quite mature and whose knowledge of the Italian language offers a handle on the work of his father, certainly makes the management of relations much easier and eliminates many obstacles.

10. The Pact of Acroma, signed on April 17, 1917, marked a sort of permanent armistice between the Italians and the forces of Mohammed Idris al-Senussi, to whom certain powers were delegated. The pact, however, contained a fundamental element of ambiguity because Italy was not giving up its demands for sovereignty over Cyrenaica, just as the Sanusiya continued to insist on their own.
11. Aside from General Tarditi, among the Italian participants in the negotiations were the lawyer Luciani and Lieutenant Colonel Sirolli. For a solid reconstruction of the negotiations of Khallet ez-Zeitun, see Ottone Gabelli, *La Tripolitania dalla fine della guerra mondiale all'avvento del fascismo*, Airoldi, Intra 1937, vol. I, pp. 208–37.
12. Among those present at the negotiations were Mohamed Fekini, Ramadan al-Shitawi, Mohammed es-Suei el-Keituni, el-Hajj Koobar, Ahmed el-Mraied, Ali es-Shanta, Ahmed el-Badawi, and Suleiman el-Baruni.
13. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
14. Ibid., p. 212.
15. ACS, *Carte Graziani*, env. 1, f. 2. Tel. no. 424, secret. The Arabs had obtained improvements in terms of teaching and justice and in connection with the structure of the governing council.
16. Rodolfo Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, Mondadori, Milan 1937, p. 7.
17. Arturo Vacca Maggiolini, *La situazione in Tripolitania*, "Rivista Militare Italiana," January 1922, p. 60.
18. Quoted in Luigi Goglia, Fabio Grassi, *Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'Impero*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1981, p. 189.
19. Aside from Mohamed Fekini, the members of the governing council were Ali es-Shanta, Ahmed el-Fassatawi, Mohammed es-Suei el-Keituni, Muktar

Bey Koobar, Omar Bu Dabbous, Mohammed el-Faqui el-Tarabulsi, and Mohammed el-Sowayi.
20. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
21. R. Graziani, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.
22. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
23. AAF, enclosure no. 27.

8 The Death of Hassan

1. Among the members, according to a document by Fekini, were Mohamed Fekini, Abd en-Nebi Belcher, Ahmed el-Mraied, el-Hajj Koobar, Ali es-Shanta, and Mohammed es-Suei el-Keituni. According to other documents, other members of the committee included Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, Khalifa ben Askar, Saadun al-Shitawi, and Muktar Koobar.
2. AAF, enclosure no. 28.
3. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
4. This passage of the memoirs of Mohamed Fekini is rather obscure. Given the break in relations between Menzinger and Ramadan al-Shitawi, it becomes difficult to imagine that “a group of Italians” might operate in Misratah in an independent and authoritative manner.
5. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
6. AAF. Governor Menzinger requested Major Voglino, liaison officer at Riaina, to convey this telegram to Hassan Fekini: “His Excellency the Minister for Colonies telegraphs that he wishes a meeting with Hassan Fekini and Azzam Bey. Please inform Hassan Fekini so that he may depart at the earliest possible time.”
7. AAF; the document bears the signature of the head of the Political Section, Captain Navarra.
8. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
9. Ibid.
10. See, for instance, the article by Mario Cartecchini in “Il Giornale d’Italia” of April 29, 1920, clearly inspired by Menzinger, in which the Arab leader is portrayed as a monster.
11. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/23, f. 208. Tel. dated May 23, 1920.
12. ASMAI, *Miscellanea*, vol. III, *Tripolitania*, *pacco* L. pp. 7/8.
13. Among those who rose to his defense, following the pubblication of the article by Mario Cartecchini, was also the former governor Vincenzo Garioni, who sent quite an indignant correction to the “Giornale d’Italia” (ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/23, f. 208).
14. R. Graziani, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
15. Mohamed Fekini, in his memoirs, put forth the hypothesis that this expedition had been organized in cahoots with the Italians (M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 226). But we find no evidence for this speculation.
16. AAF, enclosure no. 39. The document bears the date of September 3, 1920.
17. ASMAI, *Miscellanea*, vol. III, *Tripolitania*, *pacco* L. Telegram from Governor Mercatelli to the Ministry for Colonies, dated September 3, 1920.

18. See, for these complaints: AAF, enclosures nn. 30, 33, 36, 37.
19. AAF, enclosure no. 34.
20. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
21. Ibid., p. 226.
22. Ibid., p. 240.
23. The Model 91 cavalry rifle had been a gift to Mohamed Fekini, along with an automatic pistol and a cane with a golden knob, from Governor Ameglio on April 27, 1915. See AAF, cover letter for the gifts, signed by then-Lieutenant Colonel Pàntano.
24. The photographs of the tomb of Hassan Fekini were taken by his nephew, lawyer Anwar Fekini.
25. From a private and highly confidential letter from Major Voglino, liaison officer in Riaina, we learn that Hassan Fekini made an extended stay in Riaina. The officer writes: "Everyone is waiting in Tripoli to see you and I am the first among many to deplore your long stay down there, which will only cause to lose a year in taking your degree" (AAF, undated letter, probably from the beginning of 1920).
26. AAF, enclosure no. 40, datedSeptember 15, 1920.
27. Ibid., enclosure no. 41, dated September 18, 1920.
28. Ibid., enclosure no. 42, dated September 22, 1920.
29. Ibid., enclosures nn. 43 and 44, respectively dated September 26 and 30, 1920. The report of Hassan Fekini's death was telegraphed by Mercatelli to the Minister for Colonies Rossi with thesewords:

    > On the 9th armed men led by Khalifa ben Askar attacked Taredia, fully defeating both Zintan and Rojeban, who suffered serious losses, among them Hassan Fekini, son of the government adviser Mohamed Fekini, dead, Massaud Fekini, *kaymakam* of Ghadames and brother of the adviser, wounded, and the mother and cousin of the same adviser, also wounded. Hassan Fekini, who was completing a law degree, was a personal acquaintance of Your Excellency from what I have been able to learn. The homes of the Fekinis were sacked and burned. This morning the adviser Mohamed Fekini left by car for Sorman to meet his brother Massaud, who was wounded, and bring him back to Tripoli.

    The telegram bears the date of September 15, 1920, in ASMAE, b. 103, f. 390.
30. AAF, enclosure no. 54.

9 A State within the State

1. The followers of Ramadan al-Shitawi had reorganized under the leadership of a committee consisting of Ramadan's son, Ahmad al-Shitawi; the former mayor of Misratah; Omar Bu Dabbous; and the Egyptian Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam.
2. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
3. AAF, enclosure no. 50.
4. Ibid., enclosure no. 53.
5. Ibid., enclosures nn. 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60.

6. Ibid., enclosure no. 61.
7. O. Mezzetti, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
8. Ibid., p. 73.
9. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, pp. 273–83.
10. AAF, enclosures nn. 65, 66.
11. Ibid., enclosure no. 67.
12. Ibid., enclosures nn. 71 and 72.
13. Ibid., enclosure no. 74.
14. Ibid., enclosure no. 75. From an article written by M. Fekini and published by Othman el-Ghizani on August 11, 1921.
15. Various Authors, *La rinascita della Tripolitania. Memorie e studi sui quattro anni di governo del conte Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata*, Mondadori, Milan 1926, p. XX.
16. AAF, enclosure no. 76.
17. Quoted in R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
18. Ibid., p. 103.
19. The pardon was handed down by Royal Decree no. 250 dated September 11, 1921.
20. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
21. Ibid., p. 147.
22. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/26, f. 242.
23. Various Authors, *La rinascita della Tripolitania*, cit., pp. xx–xxi.
24. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
25. AAF, enclosure no. 78, dated September 2, 1921.
26. Ibid.
27. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 304.
28. Ibid., pp. 307–09.
29. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–23.
30. AAF, enclosure no. 82.
31. Ibid., enclosure no. 84, dated December 30, 1921.
32. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
33. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 150/15, f. 61, tel. no. 811. Between 1922 and 1926, el-Baruni spent almost all his time living in France, in Marseilles, attempting without success to return to any country in North Africa. He was constantly monitored by the Italian intelligence services, and his mail was invariably intercepted and read.
34. The letter from Ahmed el-Mraied is found in R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–50.
35. At first, they had thought of other leading individuals, such as Ahmed esh-Sherif and Nuri Bey. The latter had been designated during the Muslim Revolutionary Congress held in Moscow in June 1921.
36. "El-Liuà et-Trabèlsi," January 5, 1922, no. 89. The publication was edited by Othman el-Ghizani and was the official paper of the Nationalist Party, which was identified with the Central Reform Committee.
37. AAF, enclosure no. 87.
38. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/27, f. 248. From a document entitled *Il bilancio di un anno di governo*.

39. The PSI, or Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party) was the only Italian party to forcefully support Libyan claims.

10 Rodolfo Graziani versus Mohamed Fekini

1. AAF, enclosure no. 88.
2. Ibid., enclosure no. 89.
3. Corrado Zoli, *Espansione coloniale italiana*, L'Arnia, Rome 1949, p. 34.
4. Martini, a lawyer, had excellent relations with the Arab intelligentsia and offered support and suggestions.
5. C. Zoli, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
6. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 397.
7. Ibid., p. 399.
8. Ibid., p. 400.
9. Ibid., p. 421.
10. Ibid., p. 427.
11. Ibid., p. 405.
12. Ibid., p. 412.
13. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/27, f. 248. From the document cited, *Il bilancio di un anno di governo*. But what had most triggered Volpi's indignation was the way that Ahmed el-Mraied's letter had been delivered to him. Rapex recounts: "I cannot help but criticize the chiefs for having made use, for the delivery of the letter, of an ignorant shepherd, who presented himself to our Carabinieri with eleven rams, without even having the slightest idea of whom the letter he was bearing was addressed to" (R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 418).
14. Giovanni Amendola, *La nuova democrazia. Discorsi politici (1919–1925)*, Ricciardi, Milan-Napoli 1976, pp. 117–24.
15. In military terms, the attack was led by Abdalla Temsichet, who held the rank of commanding general for the western zone. The Arab formations withdrew when the heavy artillery of the battleship *Roma*, anchored at Marsa Dila, came into action.
16. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
17. Ibid., pp. 223–24.
18. Piero Pieri, Giorgio Rochat, *Badoglio*, UTET, Turin 1974, p. 505.
19. Guglielmo Ciro Nasi, *La guerra in Libia*, in "Rivista Militare Italiana," January 1927, p. 83.
20. According to Italian sources, there were 740 Arab dead. On the Italian side, there were 72 dead, 15 missing in action, and 192 wounded, almost all of them ascars, Eritreans, and Libyans.
21. R. Graziani, *Ho difeso la patria*, Garzanti, Milan 1948, p. 30.
22. R. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 32.
23. AAF, enclosure no. 95. Khalifa ben Askar was charged with abandoning his post and high treason and was hanged in Tripoli. Rapex writes about him: "He was a minor medieval despot, who had lorded it over his territory of Nalut for many years, causing trouble for the Italian government, but also

for the French, who would gladly have captured him if they had been able to venture across the border" (R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 239). Ottone Gabelli wrote, in turn: "A criminal and a bit of a nutcase, a raider by profession, in 1915 he ordered the massacre of a great many of our wounded" (*op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 253). And yet, for years, the Italian authorities had financed him and supplied him with weapons and supplies.

24. He had four secretaries. It was to them that he dictated the second half of his memoirs when his almost total blindness prevented him from writing.
25. AAF, enclosure no. 96. The document also bears the signatures of thirteen other Rojeban and Zintan notables.
26. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 241. Graziani offered the following description of the episode at el-Uchim: "A hundred or so men from the Cherbisc Group, were taken by surprise while searching for water around the camp, and that same day they were massacred and lost all their weapons. Fekini, drunk on blood and vendetta, slit the throats of thirty of them with his own hands" (R. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 39).
27. Graziani, evidently, was not well informed about the Fekini family, since he took Hussein for the nephew of the Rojeban chieftain.
28. AAF, enclosure no. 97. Dated June 4, 1922.
29. Ibid., enclosure no. 98. This letter, too, bore the signatures of eight other chieftains besides Fekini's own signature.
30. AAF, enclosure no. 99.
31. In his memoirs, Mohamed Fekini mentions 5,000 men, a mix of Rojeban, Zintan, Haraba, and Siian. There is, however, good reason to question the accuracy of this figure (M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 313).
32. AAF, enclosure no. 100.
33. Ibid., enclosure no. 101.
34. Ibid., enclosure no. 102. From the formal protest in letter form, sent by Graziani to Fekini.
35. Ibid., enclosure no. 103.
36. Ibid., enclosure no. 104. Letter dated June 10, 1922.
37. G. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 41.
38. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 316.
39. According to Rapex (*op. cit.*, p. 245), Arab losses between June 3 and 18 were 580 dead. Italian losses: 40 dead and 100 wounded. These numbers should be taken with some caution because Yusuf Cherbisc lost more than 100 dead in the battle of el-Uchim alone.
40. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
41. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 280.
42. R. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 52.
43. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 372.
44. AAF, enclosure no. 114.
45. Ibid., enclosure no. 116. In a letter dated January 21, 1923. Graziani wrote to Fekini, once again, on February 11, 1923, reiterating his insults: "God has left you alone, without followers, and defeated" (AAF, enclosure no. 118).
46. R. Rapex, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
47. Ibid., p. 308.

48. Ibid., p. 350.
49. Luigi Federzoni, *Venti mesi di azione coloniale*, Mondadori, Milan 1926, pp. 131–32.

11 To Live and Die in the Desert

1. Giuseppe Volpi, *La politica coloniale del fascismo*, CEDAM, Padua 1937, pp. 12–13.
2. Luigi Federzoni, *Venti mesi di azione coloniale*, Mondadori, Milan 1926, p. 55.
3. Giuseppe Bottai, *Mussolini costruttore d'impero*, Edizioni Paladino, Mantua 1927, pp. 26–27.
4. Cfr. Emilio Canevari, *La guerra italiana. Retroscena della disfatta*, Tosi, Rome 1949, p. 302, note 2.
5. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/29, f. 265.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., f. 267. Dated October 12, 1923.
8. On November 13, 1923, Safi ed-Din wrote from Sirte to Mohamed Fekini to inform him that the Sanusiya was ready to "offer him all its support and all its help" (AAF, enclosure no. 124).
9. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/29, f. 268. In a subsequent dispatch Volpi stated that the Tuareg chieftain Ibrahim Targuy had also taken part in the attack.
10. Ibid., pos. 122/30, f. 271. Secret, only for the personal attention of Minister Federzoni.
11. Ibid., pos. 122/30, f. 277. From Volpi to the new Minister for Colonies Lanza di Scalea, tel. 455 dated April 1, 1925.
12. AAF, enclosure no. 125.
13. AAF. Copy of document no. 555 of the trial, no. 306 of the "*rubrica*." The trial took place at el-Azizia, and the sentence was handed down by the Special Military Tribunal.
14. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/30, f. 274.
15. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 335.
16. AAF, enclosure no. 128.
17. Ibid., enclosure no. 129.
18. Ibid., enclosure no. 132.
19. Ibid., enclosure no. 133.
20. Ibid., enclosure no. 134.
21. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/31, f. 289.
22. Ibid., pos. 122/31, f. 289. Dated October 23, 1925.
23. Ibid., pos. 122/31, f. 282. Dated February 23, 1926.
24. AAF, enclosure no. B/22.
25. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 337. Among the other crimes attributed to Khalifa Zaui was that of having ambushed and murdered, not far from Brach, the former Ottoman representative Mohammed Farhat, whom Fekini, in his memoirs, described as "one of the most illustrious chieftains of Tripolitania" (ibid., p. 333). It appears that Khalifa Zaui was afraid that Farhat Bey, whose son was

in contact with the Italians, might succeed in persuading them to appoint him prefect of Fezzan.

26. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/31, f. 282. Dated April 17, 1926.
27. Ibid., pos. 122/31, f. 289.
28. ACS, *Segreteria particolare del duce. Carte riservate (Private Secretariat of the Duce, Secret Papers)*, env. 23, f. 224/R. Riservatissima (Top Secret), no. 3349. Federzoni was perfectly right when he stated that the various enemy groups had been reinforced and now constituted a serious threat. To offer a single example, the *kaymakam* of Ghat, Bubaker Lequi, an Italian ally, found himself completely isolated after the rebels took possession of Fezzan. Governor De Bono had repeatedly suggested a "rapid occupation of Ghat," to come to Bubaker Lequi's aid, but his requests had been unfailingly rejected. And so, in the summer of 1927, a thousand or so *mujahideen* occupied Ghat without firing a shot and later destroyed an entire Tuareg column, wounding and taking prisoner one of Bubaker Lequi's sons.
29. Ibid. Letter dated November 26, 1926.
30. In the battle of Tagrift, the Italians lost 5 officers and 54 enlisted men killed, and 6 officers and one 156 foot soldiers wounded. The *mujahideen*, instead, lost 247 men in the field, plus 56 others killed during the pursuit that followed. Among the Libyan dead, there was also one of the Sef en-Nasser brothers, Mohammed.
31. AUSSME, env. 156, f. 10. *Relazione a De Bono del generale di divisione L. Cicconetti sulla prima fase operativa*, p. 6.
32. "L'Oltremare," no. 7, 1929.
33. ACS, *Diario De Bono*, vol. XII, pp. 34–38.
34. Ibid., p. 68.

12 Mohamed Fekini's Last Raid

1. "Rivista delle colonie italiane," no. 3, March 1929, p. 296.
2. Quoted in Rodolfo Graziani, *La riconquista del Fezzan*, Mondadori, Milan 1934, pp. 122–25.
3. Concerning the concentration camps built at Badoglio's orders in the southern Benghazi area and in the Sirte region, with Mussolini's full approval, see Giorgio Rochat, *La repressione della resistenza in Cirenaica*, in Various Authors, *Omar al-Mukhtàr e la riconquista fascista della Libia*, Marzorati, Milan 1981; Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*, cit., pp. 174–232; Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia*, Manifesto-Libri, Rome 2005. Concerning the topic of Libyan prison camps, a conference was held in Tripoli, from December 12 to 14, 2006, entitled *Colonialismo italiano e campi di concentramento in Libia (1929–1943)*.
4. Arsenio Belardinelli, *La Ghibla*, Tipografia del R.C.T.C. della Tripolitania, Tripoli 1935, p. 249.
5. Ibid., p. 251.
6. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
7. Ibid., p. 341.

8. Ibid., p. 342.
9. AAF, *Il Fezzan*. Notes taken by Ali Nouredine Fekini in 1930 immediately after crossing the border into Algeria.
10. AAF. Original copy of the document, written in Italian, on ordinary paper, without letterhead, with official stamp.
11. The *mujahideen* had overestimated the strength of Graziani's forces. In his memoirs, Fekini raised their numbers to 50,000 men (M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 345).
12. The only clashes, limited in scale, took place on January 31, some 40 kilometers (about 20 miles) from Ubari; and on February 10, at Tachiomet, 50 kilometers (27 miles) from the Algerian border. This last-mentioned battle, ordered by Mohamed Fekini in order to allow the bulk of the column to enter Algeria unimpeded, was waged by about a hundred Rojeban fighters, chosen from among the most courageous warriors. They were led by Lamine Fekini.
13. Sandro Sandri, *Le ultime marce all'inseguimento dei ribelli*, "Il Regime fascista," March 8, 1930. Sandri took part in the Fezzan expedition and wrote a dozen or so articles. In the article dated March 12, 1930 and entitled *Il deserto violato*, he wrote about Mohamed Fekini: "And thus was the desert violated, thus collapsed the legend that the aged Mohamed Fekini of the Zintan and Rojeban had held up as a terrifying phantom to General Graziani ever since 1922, when he had first written him, bellicose and arrogant: 'If the Almighty gives us victory, our desire will be slaked; and if you win, then we will all simply take refuge in the desert.' The answer to this letter has been delivered, and old Fekini, an exile in Algeria, has learned at his own expense that the desert is—once and for all—no longer a safe haven for him."
14. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 342.
15. Not among the fugitives, however, were the brothers Mahdi and Ahmed es-Sunni, who, though they had been leaders of the rebellion since 1922, surrendered on February 28, 1930 at Ubari, in Graziani's tent. Graziani describes the episode as follows: "The Sunnis were then transfered to Mizda, where they still live today, free of all influence and all religious and political authority over the populace" (R. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 170). Fekini, in his memoirs, adds a few details: "The Italians dropped a great many bombs on the home of the Sunni family, in Dissa, near Ubari. And when they occupied Ubari they transported the family of the es-Sunni brothers to Mizda, where it suffered humiliation and violence from the Italian colonists" (M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 343).
16. Aicha died of malaria in 1927, at Ubari, at the age of 33. Ali Nouredine wrote about her: "Her death was for us a devastating ordeal: she was a sister, indeed, a mother, of an exemplary kindness, piety, and courtesy. She was also the widow of the martyr Kamel A'rab, who died on the field of honor of As Salamat, in the summer of 1922." Ali Nouredine devoted one of his finest poems to Aicha; it is entitled *The Lute*. Oufaya, born in Ubari in 1928, died in Gabes five years later from the hardships she had endured. Of Ali Nouredine's six children, born of his first marriage to Aziza, five died

in infancy. From a second marriage, to Manoubia Ben Hamida, he had four other children, including Anwar Fekini, a noted international lawyer.

17. Mohamed Fekini's first wife was Fatima, of Turkish birth, the mother of Hassan and Aicha. By Aicha Nouir, he had six children: Hussein, Ali Nouredine, Lamine, Mohieddine, Oufaya, and Mariam; Mariam is still alive.
18. R. Graziani, *Pace romana in Libia*, cit., p. 39.
19. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

13 The Long Road of Exile

1. Ali Nouredine Fekini, *Ricordi della resistenza e dell'esilio*, unpublished collection of poems; publication soon forthcoming, pp. 23–24.
2. M. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 346. The Italian authorities had asked their French counterparts to provide accommodations for the *mujahideen* at least 300 kilometers (160 miles) from the Libyan borders to prevent future armed raids.
3. The three individuals still living who remember the horrific trek across the Algerian deserts and who provided their own accounts are Mariam Fekini, daughter of Mohamed Fekini, who was 13 years old at the time; and the brothers Salem and Ali Naquassa, of the Zintan tribe, more or less Mariam's age.
4. It was in this town, as the reader will recall, that Mohamed Fekini, in the summer of 1931, dictated the second part of his memoirs to his secretaries.
5. A. N. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 124. The decision to go to Gabes was based on the fact that Sidi Abi Boulbaba al Ansari was buried in a small cemetery there, next to a mosque. Sidi Abi Boulbaba al Ansari was a comrade of the Prophet Mohammed, who was killed in 661 in Gabes during the Islamic conquests. When Fekini died, the inhabitants of Gabes, familiar with his devotion to the saint, insisted that he be buried next to the tomb. It should be stated that, with the passage of time, the esteem that the Tunisians have long felt for Fekini is slowly turning into veneration, almost as if he himself were a saint. The second reason for choosing Gabes was political and sentimental in nature: the city, in fact, is only 150 kilometers (80) from the Libyan border.
6. Ibid.
7. AAF, enclosure no. 140. Forced into exile in 1922, the great patriot of Misratah would later be one of the guiding forces in the construction of a united and independent Libya. But his rectitude brought him into conflict with King Idris, who, forgetful of the great services rendered to the nation and to the Sanusiya, allowed him to be expelled from Libya in 1952. And so, for a second time, Bashir el-Saadawi was forced into exile. After a short stay in Cairo and Damascus, he moved to Riyadh, where he took the position of political adviser to King Ibn Saud. He died in 1957, never having set foot in Libya again.
8. ASMAI, *Libia*, pos. 122/30, f. 274. This information is found in a report sent by the governor Niccoli to the ministry for colonies, dated 5 September 5, 1924.

9. ASMAE, *Ministero Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici*, b. 103, f. 390. Minister De Bono to the government in Tripoli, October 12, 1933.
10. Ibid., dated August 31, 1931.
11. Ibid., dated July 25, 1935.
12. Ibid., "secret," no. 10439, dated September 11, 1931.
13. Ibid., letter no. 5282 *"di protocollo,"* dated April 18, 1934.
14. Ibid., letter no. 20210 *"di protocollo,"* dated December 10, 1935.
15. Ibid., letter to Mussolini, dated from Gabes, July 25, 1935.
16. With respect to the rebels, there was less harshness exhibited toward ordinary foot soldiers. From 1931 to 1936, from Egypt alone, 6,050 renegades returned to Libya, with 28,783 head of livestock.
17. AAF, enclosure no. 146.
18. Ibid., enclosure no. 161.
19. Ibid., enclosure no. 145, dated February 18, 1936.
20. Concerning the dispatch of 20,000 colonists to Libya, at the express behest of Italo Balbo, see A. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1988, pp. 257–71.
21. *Il Duce in Libia*. Special edition by Agenzia Stefani, Alfieri & Lacroix, Milan 1937, p. 42.
22. AAF, enclosures nn. 153, 154, 155, and 160.
23. Ibid., enclosure no. 156.
24. Ibid., enclosure no. 157.
25. Ibid., enclosure no. 159, dated March 5, 1940.
26. Ibid., enclosure no. B/26.
27. Ibid. The document bears the date: Paris, October 3, 1955.
28. After the escape from Fezzan, Ahmed Sef en-Nasser took shelter in Chad, with a few hundred *mujahideen*. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he offered his services to De Gaulle's Free French, who had appointed General Leclerc (Philippe Marie de Hauteclocque) to reorganize the troops in French Equatorial Africa. With Leclerc, he occupied Kufra and, subsequently, Fezzan.
29. AAF. The dedication bears the date of July 1, 1947.
30. Ibid., enclosure no. 163. The letter also bears the signature of his son, Ali Nouredine, increasingly close to his father and by this point clearly appointed as his successor.
31. Ibid., enclosure no. 165. The letter bears the date of October 30, 1943. At the time, Mohammed Idris lived in Cairo, on the island of Gazirah, at no. 14 on sh. Ahmed Hichmat Pacha, Zamalek.
32. Ibid., enclosure no. 166.
33. Ibid. enclosure no. 167.
34. Ibid., enclosure no. 168.
35. The Nationalist Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*) was founded secretly in 1944 but did not receive official recognition until April 8, 1946. The National Unity Front (*al-Jabha al-Wataniyya al-Muttahida*) was founded on May 10, 1946. The National Independent Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Wataniyya al-Hurra*) came into being on May 30, 1946.

36. Salaheddin Hasan Sury, *Il destino della Libia dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, p. 9. Address to the Italo-Libyan conference in Perugia, March 1985.
37. For political affairs in Libya in the years following World War One, see A. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia. Dal fascismo a Gheddafi*, cit. pp. 326–427.
38. AAF, enclosure no. 169. This document also bears the signature of Ali Nouredine.
39. Account of Manoubia Ben Hamida, Ali Nouredine's wife.
40. Ibid.
41. AAF, enclosure no. 171.
42. Ibid., enclosure no. 172. The article bears the date May 3, 1950.

14 Let Us Restore Their Dignity

1. Ali Nouredine Fekini was married for the first time in 1928 to Aziza, the daughter of Salem Ben Abd en-Nebi, the warrior who had led, on the night of November 28, 1914, several hundred *mujahideen* in an attack on the *gahra* of Sebha, whose fall later triggered the hasty retreat of Miani from Fezzan.
2. *The Koran*, Sura XXII, 39/40, vol. 1.
3. ASMAE, *Ambasciata di Londra* (London Embassy), env. 1415, f. 2, Ambassador Cellere in London, telespr. 3/5507/C dated November 26, 1949.
4. Ibid., Cellere in London, telespr. 3/5597/C dated December 8, 1949.
5. "Al Ousbou" ("La Semaine—journal tunisien"), August 1950: *La lutte des Libyens pour leur patrie*.
6. Quoted in Majid Khadduri, *Modern Libya. A Study in Political Development*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore 1963, p. 213.
7. A.N. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 1. Of Syrian birth, in exile in France, Zahi al-Qaid is a professor of classical Arabic.
8. Ibid., p. 8.
9. This is an allusion to the Prophet's comrades.
10. A.N. Fekini, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
11. Ibid., p. 40.
12. Ibid., pp. 214–15.
13. Ibid.
14. The complete text of Gheddafi's proclamation can be found in an appendix in the "Middle East Journal," vol. 24, no. 2, spring 1970.
15. AAF, five-page document, written in Tripoli on 20 Sha'aban 1391, which corresponds to October 10, 1971. Ali Nouredine was not restored to the diplomatic corps, but beginning in 1975 he was given a pension.
16. Mohamed Yusuf al-Mugarieff, *Libya: biana al madi oul hader. Safahat min attarich al siyassi* (*La Libia tra passato e presente. Pagine di storia politica*), Maktabat Wahba, Cairo 2006.
17. S.H. Sury, *The Political Development of Libya. Trasformation of Leadership,* "Asia-Africa-Latin America," Special Issue, no. 8, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1980, p. 127.

18. For the events of January 1964 and the fall of Mohieddine Fekini, see Sami Hakim, *Haqiqat Libya*, Maktabat al Anglo-masria, Cairo 1968, pp. 295–301; id. *Hadihi Libya*, Maktabat al Anglo-masria, Cairo 1970, pp. 73–79 and 131–32.
19. Sami Hakim, *Haqiqat Libya*, cit., p. 295.
20. Account given to the author by Anwar Fekini, in an interview on October 18, 2006.
21. Because of Gheddafi's aggressive policies toward neighboring counties, Libyan-Tunisian relations were brusquely broken off in September 1985. Relations resumed during 1987, probably in part due to the intervention of the Fekini brothers.
22. Of Lamine Fekini's four children, the first-born, Mohamed, took a degree in the United States in electronic engineering. Fadel, an aeronautic engineer, did further graduate studies in Czechoslovakia and rose through the ranks to become a major. He retired in 1989, and since then, Fadel, like his brother Mohamed, has dedicated himself to the study of the Libyan *jihad*. We are grateful to the two brothers for the invaluable information they have provided and for having supplied us with books that we would never otherwise have been able to track down.
23. Mariam was 18 when she married Ali Boubaker of the Rojeban tribe. Until the death of her father in 1950, she remained under his protection in Gabes. She had four children.

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Notice: For the transcription of Arabic personal and proper names, we have made use of the most commonly accepted versions in English.